

Interviewee: David Taylor (DT)	Interviewer: Margaret Smith (MS)
Date of Interview: 31 July 2017	Ref: DG38-35-1-1-T

TITLE	DG38.35.1.2
REGION	Dumfries and Galloway.
SUBJECTS/KEYWORDS	ICI; Industry; Occupations; Shiftwork.
COUNTY	Dumfries and Galloway.
TOWN	-
DATE OF INTERVIEW	31st July.
INTERVIEWER	Margaret Smith.
YEAR RANGE	2000-
SUMMARY	<p>David talks to Margaret about his early love of mechanics and his time as an apprentice, then a journeyman then a full tradesman all with ICI. He discusses the changes over his time there from the 1970 to the 1990s and in particular the company's restructuring that ultimately ended with him losing his job, although he was to return to ICI several years later. He talks about training at Welwyn Garden City and how training was more specialised in the 1970s and became more generalised throughout his career. He mentions the many wonderful people he worked with and the mutual help they gave each other but touches on the fact that there were also co-workers that made working life more difficult in what was the already daunting environment of a large, noisy plant. He expands on the shift system in place at ICI as a 24/7 working plant.</p>

Margaret Smith (MS)

Interviewing  
David Taylor (DT)

MS: This is Monday the Thirty-first of July my name's Margaret Smith I'm a volunteer field worker here in Dumfries an' I'm here to interview David Taylor about his work experience in the local ICI factory which has totally changed over the years. So David can ah maybe start by askin' you when you were born where you were born and just a summary of your early life?

DT: Yes my name's David Taylor I was born in Perth, central Scotland which is a lovely part o' the country, family commitments meant we moved away and we ultimately ended up in Dumfries when ah wis about ten/eleven years old. [I] attended the local schools here [I came back] and finished my junior education at a primary school I attended Dumfries High School for my secondary education, during all this time or as I grew older I began to realise or I knew from an early age really that mechanical things fascinated me, it was somethin' that I can't really explain to people but anything that moves or does something I need to know how it works why it works tae get an understanding of that and so from a very early age I was aware that something along these lines would be somethin' ah would end up in ah was never particularly good academically and school was a bit of a trauma at times but ah got through and I think ah preferred the technical subjects ah preferred the sciences and ah think when I began tae understand that maths and science and the relationship between them all it became a lot easier for me to study and ah began to see how that could translate to mechanics and engineering and how things worked and so it opened a whole new world for me and so ah was settlin' doin' somethin' along those lines so when it came time for me to leave school ah didn't have the required qualifications to go to university but ah don't think ah wanted to do that anyway ah was more a practical kind o' chap ah loved workin' with mechanical things ah used to strip motorbikes bicycles to begin with and then motorbikes and then ma car ah built all sorts of things and ah had a Meccano set from a very young age which really fired my imagination and ah would recommend it for any young children to be honest if they're that way inclined.

MS: So you were just a young boy then when you were strippin' cars?

DT: Well that probably came in ma late teenage years once ah'd started work but I'd certainly had ma bicycle stripped down and all that sort o' thing and put back together and ah understood how things worked so ah was [game] an' ah was the only one in the family that really had bent but ah loved it so when we were lookin' for tryin' to decide what to do, those were the days when jobs were I wouldn't say plentiful but there were a number of opportunities for people wi' a practical background that wanted to do vocational things and I decided that's probably where the route would take me an' ICI were recruiting this would be Nineteen seventy and I applied for one of the apprentice positions and I went forward to I was called forward for an assessment and there must o' been about a hundred and thirty boys in this room ah always remember it in ICI one of the

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they'd opened up this trainin' centre for us an' we were asked to come in an' we'd sat all sorts o' tests like similar to today but in a simpler form but one o' the things ah always remember they gave us a box an' it had sixteen dookits in it an' in each dookit was a mechanical device that ye had tae assemble an' stuff pile o' parts an' ye had tae put them all together an' ah always remember ah wis one o' the first finished an' ah had them all built an'

ah really really enjoyed it an' so ah thought hoping ah would get in well within two or three weeks I'd been offered a position as an apprentice and ah was delighted with that it turned out there were ah think there were eleven ma memory may not be accurate there but there was about eleven or twelve of us actually selected out of the hundred and thirty to go forward.

MS: Gosh, so it was quite tough?

DT: It was competition and I was a bit naïve at the time ah didn't quite realise I thought everybody could do these things but it turns out that as in later life ah realise that people can't, so we started with ICI about August Nineteen seventy and we went down to Welwyn Garden City to the trainin' school down there, for the first year and that's where we learned basic manual skills there was a bit of filing and metalwork and making things there was a bit of sheet metal work there was a bit of welding and breathing there was a bit of machining turning on lathes and drilling machines and all sorts of things and we also did a section on the electrical side so there was electrical training as well so that the two trades that were sort of running at that time in tandem were doing bits of everything and they were obviously at the time they were assessing where yer strengths and weaknesses lay.

MS: Oh right.

DT: Because ah was taken on as an apprentice but ah wasn't actually told at the time which trade ah would be in an ah think that developed as the year went on.

MS: So how many trades were there then?

DT: Eh well there was all sorts of trades on those days a lot of them amalgamated in the later years but you could be a fitter or ye could be a turner or you could be a welder or ye could be a sheet metal worker or you could be a rigger you know you could do all sorts of different trades, whereas now it's more multi-skillin' ye learn a bit about each to get the job done which is slightly different to my day when you specialised in your own trade and so after the first year we came back to Dumfries an' I ah was allocated to Propafilm, the business.

MS: An' you were then going to be what kinna trade?

DT: Ah wis then told that ah wis goin' into mechanical trade an' ah would be mechanical trade an' ultimately trained to be a fitter on the plant to repair the mechanics of the plant and carry maintenance safety checks all that sort of thing

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so ah'd done ma first year ma basic year and now ah was on the plant working in the workshop with the older tradesmen an' ah was allocated certain tradespeople to work with ah was also I started a training system went intae a scheme whereby ye had certain tasks to achieve and targets set for the first year the second year the third year and assuming you got through and passed everything you weren't guaranteed you were never guaranteed a job at the end of it a position at the end of it but in those days it was likely you would be kept on and I went through the training and that was quite a, for me that was quite an interesting period because coming back to work on a plant it's a bit daunting and a bit scary to begin with.

MS: In what way?

DT: In the way the noise the smells the environment wi' the men an' ye come in contact with all sorts of different people which possibly you could say ah'd had a slightly sheltered life ah'd a good family we'd lovely times but life had maybe been a wee bit cocooned ah think lookin' back however ah don't regret that but it did mean when ah went to work it came as a bit of a shock tae see how people lived and worked an' how different attitudes ah had always believed in doin' your best an' ah still do actually but ah found that wasn't everybody didn't feel like that they had all people had different agendas and so that was quite interesting it was quite difficult the first year or two until I became established and until I gained their confidence because that's what it's about ye don't know anything and ah think ye've got to accept that ye don't know anything and you will be treated it was different days then ye were treated quite harshly by some because that's the way they'd been treated and they saw that as the right thing to do.

MS: Give us an example of maybe 'harshly'.

DT: Oh, it's difficult to say to be honest sometimes the way ye were treated ah wouldn't say it was more a mental thing you were knocked down sometimes shall ah say ah don't want to go into specifics but...

MS: You probably weren't given the praise if ye'd done a good job.

DT: No you were yes but what ah realised fairly quickly was that if you were willing and you tried, even if you couldn't do it they would give you credit for it, if they could see ye were prepared to work the guys would give you their time and over time ye got tae know them and ye built up a relationship wi' everybody now bearing in mind that in those days our workshop Propafilm workshop in the Seventies had thirty-two ah think it was tradesmen.

MS: Did they?

DT: Which was just one workshop on the site which the site now probably we would be strugglin' to have that number o' mechanical tradesmen all together,

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but times have changed things have developed that's what's happened, so I worked ma way through ma training and it was difficult ah didn't always enjoy it there were good days and bad days like everybody has, people depending on what ye were doing ye had some really horrible dirty jobs to do but that was all part and parcel o' it and that sort of, I was on a particular Propafilm I was allocated to what they call the coating section where the film it has been made and has got to be coated with a barrier property before it goes out as a packaging film and it was quite a dirty plant at that time and ye went in clean in the mornin' an' ye came home dirty at night and it was hot and it was wet and it could be quite challengin', and you worked quite long hours in those days we started at half past seven finished at ah think it was ten past four it was a funny time because o' the meal break times but ye had to work overtime overtime was in yer contract a reasonable amount of overtime and reasonable is to some people and to others can be quite a debate as I learned but we did do a lot of overtime and when I wis a youngster in ma late teens I did work a lot because in those days Propafilm the Dumfries site was expanding quite rapidly and they needed things upgraded and changed and modified quite often and because it was new a relatively new process things weren't as robust as they became later on so there were constant

breakdowns ah've seen me goin' to work seven thirty in the mornin' and comin' home the followin' mornin' at seven thirty that happened not often but it did happen they didn't let you work longer than that but that was if there was a breakdown an' ye had to work till it was finished ye either worked through and finished it or worked through till some'dy could take over from ye next mornin' to carry on so there was quite a number o' hours worked which I didn't mind but in hindsight it was a lot of time at a period o' ma life when ah maybe should hae said no at times but ah felt it was on offer an' so ah did it an' ah learnt a lot through that as well.

MS: An' that was durin' your apprenticeship?

DT: That was at the back end o' ma the last year o' ma apprenticeship an' then...

MS: So that was a four year apprenticeship?

DT: A four year ah did four years yes, so in August in Nineteen seventy-four ah became what they called a journeyman then, so ah wasn't quite a tradesman ah was time-served ah was trained but ah hadn't got any experience, so my rate of pay didn't quite go up to what a tradesman would get.

MS: Right so you became a journeyman and how long were you a journeyman?

DT: Only for a short period ICI sort o' got ye on to being a tradesman fairly quickly so, it was you went on there was a slidin' scale for age and for experience an' trades were basically on a grading structure and ye know apprentices worked each year ye were paid an increase an' then ye became a tradesman an' ye were paid at that a tradesman's rate and the unions were quite strong in those days and there was a place for them ah think and they had negotiated that a

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tradesman would get a certain rate of pay and that was fine but the older guys used to say but I should get more because I've got more experience but it was looked upon well no that's the grade seven was the grade for that job so everybody got paid the same so there was always money was always a bit of a...

MS: Was it?

DT: Yeah.

MS: In comparison do you know in comparison to the other factories in the area how was the pay in comparison?

DT: In those days it was good if ye worked in ICI ye were paid above the average for a tradesman by far for this area particularly when you compare it with the local trades the local contractors that come in and did work in the plant their tradesmen as it is today are paid much less than we were but if ye compare it wi' the likes o' Uniroyal or The Rubber Company as it was then and Carnation the rates o' pay probably would be fairly similar but it was still on the upper end it was a good place to work for in terms o' salary and wi' overtime on it a lot of people a lot of the young guys managed to get on to the property ladder and get their mortgage get their house get married and so and they would work overtime to pay for the extras and that's where ah see things nowadays bein' quite different that people do

not like paying overtime generally and over the years I have seen it change from you know you were paid a rate for the week you were paid a rate on a Saturday ye were paid a rate on a Sunday, and so that has now been eroded away an' they want ye tae take time off if ye work extra an' I think well ye need tae give people an incentive an' we had an incentive when ah was young ye could work or they didn't force ye tae work ye'd tae work a reasonable but ye could work basically what you wanted and if you were tryin' to get established it was a good way of gettin' that extra money to buy the car or to have the holiday maybe or buy somethin' for the house that ye know ye would have taken you longer to achieve an' the young ones nowadays don't have that opportunity, they've got to live on a fixed salary which must be difficult, now I was fortunate that you know I was in that environment so I always you know that's somethin' that [ ? ].

MS: Ok so once you became a tradesman how did the job develop?

DT: Well the job developed you were you then took on the role of working during your apprenticeship you worked with a tradesman for the first two or three years but for the last year ye were more an' more on your own devices ye were allocated work that you had tae decide how tae do yersel' an' the foreman was there the supervisor was there tae ask advice an' he would judge what ye could do an' what ye couldn't do so he would put ye on work or give ye work but he thought we'd give you the experience because he was also lookin' at what and this is somethin' that ah learnt as the years passed as ah became a supervisor but ye were lookin' at ye've got tae get the company to where it wants tae be 'cause

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ye've got an objective tae achieve there but ye've also got tae get the people trained up in the things that you need them to be able to do so sometimes that means compromisin' on what ye give them to do there may be a more higher priority thing that they could be on but ye say no ah need them tae have that knowledge so ye'd put them on something else so it was quite an interesting dilemma to have when yer mixin' and matchin' people but as an apprentice ah wis so ye were tryin' to gain experience and then once ye became a tradesman when ye were workin' on yer own you were then allocated maybe an apprentice to work with you depending on what how you fitted in ye know where you were in the because it was people knew like in all things there was good and bad an' people wi' varyin' abilities and it was interestin' to see because some men could do some jobs and some were better at others an' that is very difficult when ye're tryin' to manage it because they're all gettin' paid the same so they all expect to do the same job and when you know that somebody can't do a particular task as well as somebody else an' yet ye don't want to be showin' favouritism [for] that to be an issue but that was later on so then ah became a tradesman workin' on ma own an' [we're] doin' maintenance breakdowns and after the one of the good things about Propafilm was that you all had to take a turn on shifts, which meant you went from working days which is Monday to Friday to working seven days twenty-four seven on a continental shift system so ye did day shift back shift night shift and that ye used to be allocated a shift to cover or ye'd be cover for some'dy that was off to give you a bit of experience and then you were offered the opportunity to go on tae shifts to work shifts for a period o' time and that I really enjoyed the work on shifts that was [?] yer workin' on yer own yer the only man on that shift for the mechanical side and ye'd the whole department to look after an' anything they came to ye with, now when you're a young guy twenty-two/twenty-three gettin' left wi' that in the middle o' the night it can be quite daunting.

MS: Ah bet it was!

DT: When things are broken an' the supervisors say ah need it going, you had tae decide what tae do now ye had backup ye could phone yer supervisor or ye know there were systems there but ye wanted to be independent ye wanted tae learn ye wanted the guys tae know that you could do it an' that was the thing too yer young they're lookin' at you to fix it and creatin' the right impression you know you've got to get their confidence that when they call ye down you can fix it and so it's all about workin' wi people see yer workin' wi' a different set o' people yer workin' production yer workin' wi' development people that are wantin' things done maybe adjustments made so yer comin' in contact wi' a whole range o' people that ye hadn't come in contact before which was good so ye started tae see the broader outlook about on the factory floor how things worked how the departments interlinked.

MS: An' was there sometimes a bit of conflict or a bit of tension between development and production?

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DT: There was yes, development sometimes wanted things done for technical reasons that shall we simply say created more work and then that was guys generally didn't like that you know what ah mean why am ah havin' to do this? And sometimes ah felt there was a bit o' a lack o' communication if it'd been explained to them a wee bit more detail they might hae been more amenable but oh yes there was a bit of conflict there was conflict wi' the trades as well because sometimes machines would break down and there would be a conflict between the tradesmen saying there was nothin' wrong wi' it but the operator saying there was now as I gained experience and gained the knowledge I began to see that problems are not simple usually and sometimes it's very straightforward and sometimes it's simply one trade but generally if something happens in a running plant it can be a combination of a number of factors an' when you go down you have to identify investigate what's goin' wrong it may be that you've then got to call in another tradesperson because there'd be a shift fitter on which would be maself there'd be an electrician an' a shift instrument man so there's three of us covering the plant covering different trades and it may take the three of us tae actually get to the root of the problem and that then led ye into bein' able to persuade and convince people because sometimes [an] electrician would come down and say there's nothin' wrong wi' it an' ah would say well ah've checked it mechanically an' it's workin' fine but electrically ah'm not convinced it's right and he would say it's fine an' the operator would say well it's still not runnin' properly an' ah would say right well we need there is somethin' wrong we can't say there's nothin' there is somethin' we need to get to the bottom o' this and that then ye would could cause conflict between us sometimes about it's my fault it's his fault you know that sort o' nonsense that so that was an interesting thing which I stored away for later years an' ah used that experience o' bein' in that situation to try to try and think what I would do when I if I got to the position and I did get to the position o' havin' to take charge and fault find a major problem an' how we worked the trades together an' makin' sure that people were convinced that it could be in their department on their role that the fault lay.

MS: And what did you find was the kinna key to that success?

DT: Ah think simply explaining what you had found and what you had done explaining a logic about what you thought was happening and trying to persuade the person to say accept that there might be an element o' doubt that what he was sayin' although it checked out ok

as ah said from an electrical point o' view it might be right from a mechanical point it might be right but when ye bring the two together ye might not be gettin' the right outcome on the machine and so you had to say well what subtleties in here, this is very [simplistical] this but you had to get the people to come together now that was difficult when you were at the same level as them and when you...

MS: And being a young man.

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DT: And being a young man and trying sometimes you're on with a tradesman that had been on a long time and seen an awful lot an' you were tryin' to come up against him as say look ah think there might be [ ? ] don't be so silly you know what do you know? So there was like this it was all about people having confidence in what you were saying so all you could do and all I did was I kept workin' away at tryin' to show that I was keen to learn an' that what ah said was right an' ah would check before ah said it ah wouldn't just go an' say somethin' ah would try an' do ma upmost so that when they did check they found that what ah'd said was right and they gradually over years that begin people then know if ye're talkin' to them well he knows what he's talkin' about but that takes a while for people to gain that an' ye've got to have it's compromise as well it's not goin' in an' there was a lot o' young guys are very over confident and they could do it ye know and that was sometimes that is a good thing because ye need people that are confident but when yer over confident that's when mistakes are made things are not done as well as maybe ye because they don't know they don't realise they don't know or they don't accept an' that is very difficult so that comes through as an apprentice ye could see the ones that were confident an' the ones that maybe needed a bit o' encouragement an' that so we can park that for a minute so that's where we were so ah was on shifts for a period and then ah came off ah did ma time an' ah came back on tae days and there was a development job a production an' development job came up an' ah was asked tae apply for so this was takin' me from ma trades job on tae a product job so this was lookin' at the machines an' developin' new products a totally different area for me and I did that for four years ah was on shifts for four or five years wi' that job and I enjoyed it but I missed the mechanics although there was an element o' mechanics in it it was more it was a field that I didn't get that sort of buzz from and I realised that ah wanted to go back and so my I eventually had to find a route back and there were always vacancies comin' up in different sections so there was a job in the drawin' office so ah applied to go back there.

MS: In the drawin' office?

DT: In the drawin' office engineering.

MS: In the Propafilm - ?

DT: Yeah it was Propafilm again 'cause ah was in ah'd stayed in Propafilm the two businesses Melinex an' Propafilm on the plastic division site an' I was in Propafilm for the whole o' ma time up until the Nineties so that aspect of it so ah went ah moved to the drawin' office and ah enjoyed that ah was back in ah was doin' a bit o' design ah was doing so ah'd moved from working on the equipment to the development job which taught me what the equipment did an' what we're tryin' to achieve with it which was really good for later on because ah used that knowledge when ah went back in tae the engineering an' ah was designing machines ah was [designing] bits o' kit ah had a bit o' understandin' of what not just from a

mechanical point of view but what from a processing point of view they wir tryin' to achieve an' that was good that was good knowledge to have so

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ah did that for two or three years an' then a supervisors job came up and ah'd applied for one or two and been unsuccessful but that was just the way it happened but ah think the third time I applied I was appointed as a supervisor and that's when life changed again because you were now lookin' after and responsible for people and for the plant an' for the work and that's when you started tae use some o' the things that ye'd learned an' the bit about the people started tae become a big factor how did ye get the best out o' people, and you then also saw a bit more clearly about peoples objectives and what work meant to people and how I, I always wanted tae do a good days for a good days pay that's what I always thought an' I tried always to do, ah'm not always sayin' ah always succeeded but ah tried an' that was jist ah think partly ma upbringing' n'that mum and dad instilled in me that ye've got tae earn yer living an' ah wanted to an' ah recognised ICI was a really good company to be with maybe not as much as ah realise now but at that time ah was aware that ah was in good company an' that ye were looked after is something happened if ye took ill it was all there for ye which it wasn't in other places you know if you'd been other places in the town you wouldn't hae got that so but people tended tae get a bit blasé about that and you didn't fully appreciate or didn't give that aspect of it enough credence but it was there and it was really valuable.

MS: You say about ICI being a good company, was that generated from the top down or how was that - ?

DT: I don't know I just perceived it to be that by the way they went about things by the way it was organised ah think by the people they employed you know the managers obviously I when I got into a more senior role I became yer field opens up and ye see more and more of the different people people in different departments ye have contacts with so ye start tae see an' ye start tae see the range of experience that was there was fantastic an' ah think in the Seventies an' by now when I was a supervisor was in the Eighties it was beginnin' to change but it was really good ICI was startin' to go through the big change it was cuttin' back it could see that the way it had operated for the last forty years was not gonna continue that we'd tae diversify an' get rid o' the parts that were not core an' it was all about core businesses and they started tae costs became a bigger factor caused drives tae reduce production costs reduce mannin' tried tae do multiskilling all that was startin' to become to the fore they were looking at ways o' making the company more streamlined more efficient and that started to have a real effect on everybody whereas the first ten or fifteen years ye didn't notice that so much ye were in a big organisation and things bumbled along very similar there were changes but then the mid-eighties jist about the time ah became a supervisor the changes started an' they wanted to do multiskilling they wanted the electricians to do part o' the fitters work they wanted fitters to do [part o' the elec - ] and there was a lot o' resistance to that.

MS: And how was that kinna communicated down to people like yourself as a supervisor were you part o' that kinna discussion about - ?

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DT: Yes we were told that changes were comin' an' it was for really it was for the long term future of the business, basically an' if ye were half watchin' what was goin' on ye could see

that every industry was startin' to go through the same, so it was no surprise to me that we were havin' to do it an' there was a lot o' resistance to change people don't like change.

MS: No, that's right.

DT: They don't, now ah'm I struggled with some of it maself I'll not deny that but ah think change happens change is the only constant really. Ah think, how should we say, there were changes at all levels in every way they wanted everybody tae be workin' differently more efficient an' sometimes it worked an' sometimes it didn't but sometimes ye've got tae try it tae see if it'll work or not.

MS: An' were they happy for if you did try something and you could then feed that back to more senior managers to say that didn't work?

DT: There were, I think there was more of we've got to make it work.

MS: Right.

DT: You know this is the future an' either yer with us or yer not, and they were pushing it down an' it was really difficult there were difficult times because they wanted the guys to work differently they wanted them to take on multiskilling that led to issues with well I don't want to be an electrician if I'd wanted to be an electrician that's what I would have trained as and there was only a certain you know so I had a lot o' sympathy wi' that aspect that argument, and even now forty-odd years later multiskillin' has never really fully taken off, it's still electrical an' the mechanical an' the two trades if ye take them generically will cross over in certain places but generally they are different an' they require an' this is only my personal opinion but they require slightly different approaches tae work an' the way people are an' the way they work an' they think and so a really good electrician might not make a really good mechanical man and vice-versa, but ye need a lot o' the same skills 'cause a lot of things overlap but generally the electrical trades have amalgamated the control the computing now a lot of that has come into electrical trade but the mechanical trade has stayed very similar because there's not been the big changes in it that ye've seen in the electrical side, electrical's seen a tremendous change in the last forty years because they've had tae embrace computing, software ye know bein' able tae understand interpret software how tae programme all that has become on tae the electrical guys shoulders, whereas the mechanical guys are still doing basically the same things but on more sophisticated kit. An' it is subtly different there are a lot o' different ah could spend all day talkin' but it doesn't matter anyway so there are differences now but generally the trades so that phase if ye like or that transition period went on from the Eighties into the Nineties and I had some really good but hard years in those times tryin' to get the plant running breakdowns getting called out at all times of the day and night that was just

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normal for when you were in industry and on a runnin' plant that never stops ye've got tae accept that ye'll be disrupted and I didn't particularly mind it ah enjoyed it because ah enjoyed what I really as I got older an' ah really began to learn that what I really loved was investigatin' the problems, tryin' tae understand an' I would an' that's how [to] come back to the people bit again so tryin' tae get people involved with solvin' problems an' solvin' the problem itself an' ah got a wee bit o' a reputation ah think as bein' able tae go in an' analyse what's goin' on an' then come up wi' a solution so ah was taken out o' ma supervision role an' ah went into a mechanical engineers job but lookin' at reliability so we would you would

have a bit of a plant that was running but maybe not runnin' as efficiently as it should be there was it was breakin' down a lot, regular maintenance was not solving the problem ye know it was not getting to the root of the problems so they were at a sort o' impasse an' they would say tae me look, such an' such is happenin', go an' find out.

MS: An' you were working on your own?

DT: Ah was workin' more on ma own ah was given ye know my immediate boss would say look these are the tasks these are the issues we've got this is what's costin' us the time can ye go an' have a look an' work through come back with proposals and then from that ah would work up projects purchase equipment talk tae suppliers so it opened up a whole new field for me, it was really good an' that's where I got to wi' that and ah really hud two or three good really good years in that role with ICI but then in the Nineteen ninety-nine ICI sold the business to UCB at Wigtown an' aw things changed ah was we had two plants in Propafilm in Dumfries Propafilm one and Propafilm two Propafilm two ah worked across both at that time ah had jobs in both but ah was told that the sale was comin' up and that I had tae move maself up to Propafilm two, now this would be in the February Ninety-nine an' within a week it had been announced that the business was bein' sold and that Propafilm one would close Propafilm two would remain open and that ah would be working on Propafilm two but for UCB.

MS: Right.

DT: So there was a great change for everybody there quite a shock tae people that didn't really see it comin' well they knew things were not good the business was not makin' as much money as they were hoping it was difficult times pressure from competitors the plant gettin' older there was a lot of issues but nothing that other businesses don't go through so that was the start of the site the big change Melinex was sold to Dupont Propafilm was sold to UCB ah went to UCB they ran us for a year and it was announced the following February that Propafilm two would close and that we'd all be redundant. And ah was quite shocked actually because it was the first time in my life that ah had been in that situation and ah took it quite hard ah will admit I didn't expect it ah felt we were bein' sold tae [run us] but ah don't think it had ah think there'd been a bigger plan because the unit in Dumfries in Propafilm two the production unit was

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actually stripped down and taken to Wigtown and rebuilt there, an' I asked my boss in Wigtown the senior engineer if there was jobs goin' he said no, he said nobody in Dumfries will be kept on, yer on yer own, so that's when things changed and ah had tae start lookin' for other work the plant closed about the April ah think an' then I actually managed to get a position with Utech which was the engineering wing of ICI had an office in Dumfries on the site and I got a job as a contractor for them as an engineer mechanical engineer so through one o' my contacts in ICI I was asked if ah would work up at Dalry at Vitamin C plant at Dalry Roche so ah went up there for a year an' that was, that was difficult [it] was tryin' tae become established again you were in wi' new people ye were a contractor ye weren't part o' the team, so that wis on a whole other life experience which ah'm glad ah did but ah didn't enjoy much an' ah wis away from home which ah realise was not for me some men ah'd worked with over the years worked away from home all the time they would contract to contract an' they'd go home at weekends or they would go home when they could an' I found bein' away from the family Pam an' Tess ah was just not not for me that's not what ah wanted tae do so ah was lookin' for ways o' gettin' back to Dumfries and by good chance

and by ah think by luck, DuPont were lookin' for a contract mechanical engineer on plant five and ah was asked if ah would like to come back home an' work here so ah worked as a contractor for three years on DuPont in plant five so ah was now workin' in the Melinex [?] the old Melinex business which was now DuPont and that came to an end as well ah got word that that money was dryin' up so that position would not be there long term so ah then went to work at Gates Power Transmission at Heath Hall ah was the maintenance engineer there and that was interestin' similar problems similar things same world just different people but different totally different company in terms of the way they treated people I had been as I said to you before I had been very lucky [ countless ] bein' at ICI and then wi' Utech as well ye were looked after, when ah went to Gates, well Gates Power Transmission it was a harsh harsh environment.

MS: Was it?

DT: Aye, yep definitely it was ah was -

MS: What made it harsh?

DT: The way they treated ye. [ ? ] It was, the management style was different they ruled with a rod of iron an' there was no give or take it was all -

MS: What there was an expectation you had to do X Y and Z and that was it?

DT: Yes and at anytime that you know that, particularly me 'cause if things broke down ye were there ye had to be there, there was no the pain o' not bein' there was too great so it was difficult period ah was there for four years ah enjoyed the work really good 'cause they had slightly different equipment so there was a lot of different problems and that aspect of it ah loved the managin' the men wasn't

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too bad because ah'd that experience but dealing with the managers was quite brutal at times, for me, 'cause ah'm a softy ah think but I found it really hard, really hard and yeah that's all ah'll say on that so after that ah was actually phoned by an engineer at DuPont and he said there's a job comin' up would ye like tae come back we're lookin' for a mechanical engineer to do reliability work.

MS: Oh gosh!

DT: An' ah thought aw manna from heaven but he said unfortunately he said yer gonna have tae go through the selection procedure so I applied to DuPont went through the system, fortunate enough to get an interview ah seemed to do reasonably well an' ah got a 'phone call sayin' if yer interested the job's yours so in Nineteen no Two thousand and eight by this time I went back to DuPont and ah worked on plant five and ah was in fifty-three well basically across plant five but and that was really probably the best years because ah was then purely lookin' after lookin' at issues on the equipment which ah really that's what the whole job encompassed ah could go away an' sit an' think about things come up wi' solutions ah was doin' project work ah was just doin' the whole [gambit] an' meetin' all sorts o' different people so that was good ah really enjoyed that and I think because because o' ma history an' because Dumfries is a small place an' because everybody knew me as well it made it a lot easier that they knew that if ah wis recommendin' somethin' ah'd thought it through an' there was a reason ah didn't say things jist, ah had thought it well through

before ah'd recommended what ah did an' my boss was really good really good to me an' he gave me a free hand he said you do it if you say it needs done well you can do it.

MS: That's brilliant.

DT: It was really good so ah can't thank him enough for that, so ah had some really good years up until ah retired so ah ended ma days on a high note ah never really went in to pure management that was not me ah was not in academia but where ah did really like and excel was in the interface between the machine what it should be doin' an' what it's not doin' an' how do we achieve that how so we modify it change it an' then bring in the theory as well into that tae try an' help from the theory side.

MS: And over the years David did ye have any additional training?

DT: Oh there was yes there was other courses there was all sorts o' things you went to so ah haven't spent much time on that no but yes there were all sorts of supervisory courses there was training safety training, because all that was to the fore ye know safety was paramount and risk assessments for doing work so you were living you were starting to see I went in when there was very little of that in the Seventies and saw all how that changed and grew up with it and yes it was frustrating at times and yes I had a lot of difficulty at times trying to reconcile well I've got tae achieve this but all these regulations how are we goin' tae do it ye know? And that added to the job as well but it did make things more

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difficult but it was right they were absolutely right in what they wanted so. Aye it was good ah met a lot o' good people, a lot o' clever people and different types o' people, and ye know ye see how people live and that was another thing about bein' a supervisor you saw how life treated some people, through no fault of their own things went wrong and you maybe didn't get personally involved but you were aware of it because they were working for you and things would happen an' it was good it just made ye a wee bit humble I think.

MS: What did ye feel because by the time you became a tradesman an' you were then bein' allocated an apprentice, were you?

DT: Yes.

MS: To work with how did you feel how did you manage that role?

DT: I was I took a wee bit of a softer line with them I think, I tried tae [enthuse] them because ah thought if they were interested they would be better rather than just say do this do that ah would explain why we were doin' it because ah felt if ye understand why yer doin' somethin' ye'll buy intae it better, and that worked now as a supervisor and as a mechanical engineer ah did come across apprentices that were not interested, an' ah don't blame them for that because it's very difficult when yer young to know exactly what ye want tae do an' it became apparent wi' some o' them that mechanics was not their thing or they weren't that interested they were more interested in music or which was valid at that age because ye don't know life's all changin' yer gettin' older yer learning, but there were people ye realised were not suited.

MS: And did ye try an' kinna guide them?

DT: Yes ah would 'cause I did a bit of, I was the apprentice trainer for a period I was responsible for their training and a couple o' guys ah had to say look is this really for you? And you know in yourself and they said no ah don't want tae do this an' one o' them wanted to work in the music industry he wanted to be a roadie would ye believe and ah said tae him ye love yer music don't you? He said aye ah said is there nothin' you could do there, nothing at all? Oh he said I'd love to be a roadie I says why don't you look intae it, why don't ye just go and see so he eventually through no fault o' mine he didn't get a job ah think ah had tae recommend that he was maybe quite not suited to what we needed an' personnel decided well maybe he's not for us so that was their decision fortunately not mine, well ah met that boy about three or four years later in the town ah met him in the centre o' the town an he said how're ye gettin' on he said well ah did what ye said an' ah work as a roadie ah go out and ah work wi' the bands an' a set up for them an' ah strip their equipment ah put it all back he says ah've been all round the country he says ah love it I absolutely love it, an' ah said there ye are so ah said ye've found somethin' that ye really want tae do an' he said yes.

MS: With your encouragement.

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DT: Well ah don't know if it was my encouragement or not but that was, I think one o' the things and ye find it in life or at least I have I enjoyed what I did basically there were things that ye didn't life is never a hundred percent but there were a lot o' people ah came in contact with that spent their whole workin' life doin' somethin' they didn't want to do and when I retired I thought to myself I don't know how I would feel if I'd got to this position now after spending years doing something that I didn't really want tae do ah said ah could not have lived wi' myself an' I used tae say tae some o' them look if ye don't really like it why are you doing it an' it came down tae where else will ah get a job payin' this money, an' it was so that ah counted myself very fortunate that ah'd found somethin' that was generally to ma liking because there was a number o' people no' a lot really because most people gravitated to jobs that they got somethin' out of but there one or two round pegs in square holes an' they were like that all their working life and ah felt sorry for them in a way but you know they probably their compensation was their family and their home and their wife but their time at work must have been quite difficult an' ye know time must have hung heavy some shifts for them.

MS: Difficult.

DT: But ah think that's the same everywhere.

MS: Absolutely, David I think you have covered such a lot and it's been absolutely fascinating an' ah think we'll draw it to a close is there anything else you would like to add?

DT: No the only thing that ah would add is that ah think that ah met a lot o' good people an' ah got a lot of help from a lot o' good people an' ah would just like to thank them all for that from when ah first started right through to the end all the people ah came in contact with that offered me advice an' help ah can't thank them enough.

MS: Well on that note thank you.

00:54:06