

Interviewer:

What is your full name?

Participant:

My full name is David Lawrence Cannell.

Interviewer:

What year were you born?

Participant:

I was born on the 8th of November, 1960.

Interviewer:

Where were you born?

Participant:

I was born in a place around about six miles from here called Lewisham.

Interviewer:

What did your parents do for a living?

Participant:

My dad worked in Fleet Street as a casual on the print. Now, a casual on the print wasn't a printer, wasn't a full-time worker. They was known as jobbers and they went from paper to paper. So, all the papers that come out each week, each day, they worked on different ones. Wherever the work was, they went as casual workers to that.

My mom worked in supermarkets. We used to go down to Kent. My mom and dad moved down to Kent to where the fruit orchards are, the cherries. With my auntie, they used to work through the seasons fruit picking. And then, she ended up working for a newspaper. She was a receptionist for one of the local town newspapers.

Interviewer:

Please tell us why you decided to work for the Royal Mail?

Participant:

Why did I work for the Royal Mail? Well, in June 1986 I was looking for a new job. I'd come out of the forces several years before, and I wanted a new start. I was going through a little bit of a bad spot. I wasn't in the greatest positions. I saw an advert in the Evening Standard for postal workers, recruiting at Mount Pleasant. So, I filled in the application. It was not going to be a career move for me. It was going to be just a job to tide me over. So, I started in June 1986.

Interviewer:

Tell us about any family members who worked for the Royal Mail.

Participant:

I've got one auntie that worked for Royal Mail, but she worked as a sub-postmistress in a small town in Kent called Faversham, which is just outside Canterbury.

Interviewer:

What did your family members think about your decision to work for Royal Mail?

Participant:

I wasn't getting on very well with my family at the time. I'd left home. I'd worked. I was getting on. And then, I moved back to London. Obviously, I didn't have any family members around me. I took this job. My parents didn't find out for several years that I was working for Royal Mail. When they did find out, they were very pleased for me. Very pleased for me.

Interviewer:

Tell us about how you started working for Royal Mail.

Participant:

How did I start working for Royal Mail? Well, do you guys know where Mount Pleasant is?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Participant:

You've been to Mount Pleasant. And you know the nearest train station to Mount Pleasant is King's Cross, yeah? Just down the road. Obviously, at King's Cross Station, there's a big building called Argyle House. It's now a storage center, like a big yellow box storage center, to where people who haven't got a lot of storage space they can take their stuff there now. I went for the interview at Royal Mail. Had a good interview. Then I got the papers to attend this school. It used to be a postal school for all the London areas. So, all the big offices in London. Mount Pleasant wasn't the only one. There were six major sorting offices and they all used to have to do two weeks' training at Argyle House down at King's Cross. And then you went to the post office or the BO that you had selected. I'd selected Mount Pleasant and then I went to Mount Pleasant.

In those days, we got uniforms. It looked a bit like Teddy Boys. They're gray uniforms. You didn't get those for several weeks because you had to be measured up in what they called the uniform stores. It's like being a guide or a brownie or a scout. You got measured up for your uniform but it didn't come. So, you had to wear a dust coat and you looked out of place. So, for two or three weeks you looked out of place, you had an arm band on, and you went round learning the different jobs that you had only had basic training on. So, they would teach you how to sort letters.

And there was letter sorting [inaudible 00:04:16]. At the school, we had to do a minimum of 300 letters in 15 minutes on the box frames. You know the box frames you've seen at the postal museum? Well, there was one for the whole of England and Northern Ireland and Scotland and Wales. And then once that had split down, it went to secondary sorting. So, there'd be one in Kent. 48 towns in Kent. All right, Chatham, Sittingbourne, Canterbury, all those. You'd select those. So, you would gradually learn those.

You could get promotion. Mount Pleasant had a lot of postmen in it. It had 2,000 postmen in it at one time. The next level up was Postman Higher Grade. Now, they were the real speedy sorters, the ones... If you've ever seen a film called The Night Train? The Night Trains used to run from King's Cross but they got their staff from Mount Pleasant and they used to sort all the country's selections, whether you was going up to the Northwest, up to Lancaster, up to Glasgow, Northeast up to Durham, Yorkshire, and Edinburgh, Southwest down to Gloucester and, of course, the rails. Those tracks followed the old Roman towns. So, as you got used to it, you got a schedule. A schedule was a worksheet, and then you signed for that job for a year or you signed for a reserve and worked in the office.

Interviewer:

What was the first job you did for the Royal Mail?

Participant:

First job I did for the Royal Mail after I left the sorting school, I went on one of the first... Have you seen pictures of the automated sorting machines, the ISMs and the CFCs? They use big drums. They do lots of letters, now. They used to have 144 selections. That's how basic they were at one time. One would do Kent and Sussex, one would do Hertfordshire and Middlesex, one would do Cambridge, Suffolk, and Norfolk and all their selections, et cetera. And they were very slow. Some people thought that they could sort by hand quicker than these machines. That was the first job I done. It was the first start of the mechanization or the automated sorting machines. That's the first job I done in Mount Pleasant.

Speaker 3:

Just before you ask the next question, I'm just going to move this. Stop your playing with it.

Participant:

Sorry.

Speaker 3:

That's fine. It's fine. Great. [inaudible 00:06:29].

Participant:

Got it.

Interviewer:

Tell us about how you felt on your first days at work.

Participant:

My first day at work was like... Can you remember your first day at school? You had that little bit of nerves about and apprehension and, "Am I in the right place? Am I going to make friends? Am I going to get on with people? Are they going to like me?" But then you get used to your surroundings. You get used to the surroundings. You make friends. You make work colleagues. And some of those colleagues I still know now from nearly 40 years ago. I still see and talk to them now.

Interviewer:

Describe your work in those early days.

Participant:

My work in those early days. Well, my first shift pattern, it was an odd time. Something like 12:36 to 9:48. There's loads of different shift patterns, but that was the time that the automated sorters started up and they run through the night. They didn't run from 6:00 until 12:00 in the mornings. So, we would go. In the first hour, we would be spent general sorting. General sorting was down on the primary with the first selections, the fresh mail coming in, whether preparing it for sorting or sorting it into the boxes. Then we would have a short tea break and then we would go up to the machines.

You would be allocated a machine. There was eight machines in Mount Pleasant, three people on eight machines. Their work came from what was known as the typers. They used to type the postcodes in, to give the little blue dots. It's all done by machines now but at first these were done by people typing, people who could type. They would type, it would press in, and it would indent on the envelope with those... I think they're red lines, now. If you get one of your envelopes that's sent to your house, you have two red lines. The top line is the selection for the town and the road and the bottom line is the selection for the counties.

Interviewer:

What was the atmosphere like at your work in the early days?

Participant:

It was quite strange. Obviously, there was a lot of people there. A lot of people had friends and family that worked in the same places, a lot like the print, a lot like the docks, that had introduced their family members into it. I wasn't that lucky. I didn't have anyone that worked there. I needed to get a job. I took the job and I went through the flow.

But you make friends. It's something for all of us to learn when you go into a new environment, when you progress through school or university, college, or whatever you're going to do. It's easy to make friends. It's easy to lose friends. But if you treat people how you expect to be treated yourself, you get on well with everyone. I had a good life in the post office. I had a very good life in the post office.

Interviewer:

What kinds of people were you working with?

Participant:

What kind of people? In what way?

Interviewer:

As in just people you worked around.

Participant:

What, religions? Gender? Or-

Interviewer:

In the post office.

Participant:

In the post office. We was a very mixed bunch. When you get to know people, there was people from all over the world in Mount Pleasant. It was one of the most diverse post offices. It was known as the Inland Section. It was one of the most diverse post offices in the country. There was every world religion worked in there. There was every race. And there was every gender. So, we had male, female. Not a lot of females when I first started there, but it gradually evolved.

There was also a lot of old-fashioned working practices. If you've heard of national service where people were asked to go into the army, the air force, and the navy, they had to do it and then they come out. A lot of those older guys were still working there and they still thought they had stripes and drums on their arms. So, they wanted everything done by the book. A lot of old-fashioned [inaudible 00:10:25], shall we say practices. In the way we loaded the vans, things would be chalked up on blackboards, and everything would be handwritten. We didn't have the luxury of the electronic stuff that you guys have today.

Interviewer:

How diverse was your workplace when you first started?

Participant:

When I first started? Even to this day, when I started in 1986, it was the most diverse place I've ever worked in. There was people from all over the world. There was people from all walks of life, and they all got on. Now, I made friends with lots of people, lots of different religions. I had people come to my daughters' christenings. I had people coming to my wedding, my marriage. I've been to Diwali. I've been to Christian, Roman Catholic, Church of England, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, and Muslim celebrations in my 21 years at the post office. That's how diverse we was in 1986, 1987. And it was a big shock for me. It was a big eye opener. I went in the forces in 1977, when I left school. That was diverse, but it wasn't as diverse as working in the post office.

Interviewer:

What sort of equipment did you use in your work?

Participant:

What sort of equipment? Hopefully, I've explained a little bit about the sorting machines. Believe it or not, scissors were a big part. Every bag was tied at the top in what we called a goose neck and a string and a metal seal on it. Those scissors had to be... Those seals had to be opened up and counted. So, if 30 bags came from a certain place, the last bag would have a number on it and that would be the amount of bags in the dispatch and how many registered or very precious items. So, you have to open and count the labels so you know that you've got the right amount. Those scissors were like a crab's claw. They're not straight scissors like that. Did you see them at the post office? No? They look like that. So when you put that underneath the knot, you just cut it in one slit.

Not very environmentally friendly, now, we used to use sack bags, wooden barrows. Did you see the barrows at Mount Pleasant in the museum? They stand about five foot, big handles on them. You could get 10 bags on them and you would have a way of pulling them back. That was how we transported everything round.

There was also something called the tray conveyor. The tray conveyor was a tray and it had 10 holes, five at each end. You would put pegs in. Each number pegs... It was invented in the 1920s and

they were still using it right up until 1998. So, the pegs would go round the ceiling of Mount Pleasant sorting floor and they would drop down to the division or the county that they wanted. So, Kent, Sussex, [inaudible 00:13:35]. Would go all the way around like that and they would come down the chute. Postman would pick it up and put it on the sorting tables for the PHGs. So, we used that.

A lot of string, a lot of elastic bands. They went out of fashion when plastic ties came in. You know the cable ties that you use now? They went out of fashion when they came in. Pens were another important thing, because we had to write the labels. Everything had to be labeled. Everything had to be handwritten and everything had to be tied up by hand.

Interviewer:

Describe your uniform.

Participant:

My uniform. My first uniform, and if you've seen the picture... Did you see any black and white pictures there on the walls?

Interviewer:

We saw pictures-

Participant:

We look like we've got wedding suits on. Yeah? In the winter. Very dark gray suit. Dark gray trousers, a dark gray jacket. In the summer months, we had light gray. We didn't have shirts to start off with. You could wear your own shirts. You had to wear black shoes and black socks. Obviously, that evolved and it sort of eased off a little bit.

If you worked on areas with lots of dust, lots of sack, you had dungarees and dust coats. So, you had a dust coat you could wear. Dust coat gets its name from stopping the dust getting on your underneath clothes. Dungarees, I'm sure you guys know what dungarees are. So, we had those, as well.

Then, our uniforms changed. They went more blue. We didn't get outside cold and wet weather wear until the mid-90s. And then, if you've seen a postman now, a lot of them wear shorts. We was never allowed to wear shorts to start off with. They wear blue shirts or red polo shirts. And that's how the uniform has evolved. We were still wearing the same uniform that they were wearing in the 60s when I joined in the 1980s.

Interviewer:

Tell us about the skills you needed for your job.

Participant:

The skills you needed for your job? Depending on what area you worked, you would be needing have good communication skills, which you guys are getting good at today, by the looks of it. Be able to write. You had to be able to read to a pretty good standard and have numeracy skills for the numbers and the timings. Everything was done on timings. Of a night, for instance, there was two dispatches, one at 12:00 at night called the B1 and one at 2:00 in the morning called the B2. Anything else had to catch up after that. You had to be able to count how many bags were going to each town, how many letters. You had to be able to weigh bags to be of a certain weight. So, you needed those skills.

You also needed to be able to communicate and understand what people were telling you to do. So, if you came over to me and said, "Dave, we've got 28 bags going to Sittingbourne down in Kent," I had to know there was 28 bags, or two barrel loads, and take them to the right van. It was pointless just dumping them on the platform. People had to know where they was going. So, they were stacked in order so you would know where to put stuff in relation to where it was being sent in the country.

Interviewer:

Describe a typical day at work.

Participant:

A typical day at work? Depending on the shift... I worked nights for a long time, and then I went in what was known as the book room or the resource center where they used to do the overtime, balance of force, annual leave, wages. So, a typical day of work, for an average postman working on the sorting, would be you would go in and you would check your schedule. If you had an aligned schedule to you that you had signed for or you was a reserve... The easiest way to explain it would be a reserve. So, you would look 2:00 to 3:00, general sorting. And then it would say 3:15 to 7:00 at night, working on one of the divisions under supplying the mail to be sorted by the PHGs. 7:00 until 10:00, if you finished at 10:00, or 9:48, you may be on a platform loading the vans or you may be on a platform offloading or working on one of the areas.

Now, there was areas where mail came from the other sorting offices in London by the underground railway. It would come up from the ground. That had to be sorted into the various areas. So, you would have what we called a corral, a big ring of barrows, all numbered. You knew what they were, where they were going, after a while. So, one Kent, Sussex, Essex, all the way round. You would load then, look at the labels. This is where your reading skills come into to. Then someone would say, "How many bags have we got for the B1?" And you'd say, "Well, you've got another 20 bags coming over, gov." And that would be talking to the governor. So, you was communicating with people all the time.

Interviewer:

What were your favorite things at work?

Participant:

Sorry?

Interviewer:

What were your favorite things at work?

Participant:

My favorite things at work? It was a very good working environment in Mount Pleasant. One of my favorite things was the camaraderie in the sports and social club. We had a big sports and social club there where you could play all sorts of sports, whether it was cricket or darts or cards. After I'd been there about 18 months, I got invited to be one of the committee reps. I ended up being the chairman of the sports club. The chairman worked with the secretary. The secretary actually run it. His name was Chris McNamara. With him in the committee, we used to go all over the country. We paid subs into the sports club each week. So, it was quite a big do to go away.

This is where our friendships evolved from. Anyone had any big do, say Christmas, we would do pantomimes for the children and the underground railway would be... One of the sidings would be made into Santa's Grotto, and they would come round and we would hand out presents. Or, if it was one of the, shall we say one of the ceremonies or parties in January, money would go towards that. So, if it was a Hindu ceremony or a Sikh ceremony or Diwali or... What's the big one in November? Guru Nanak's birthday? Do you know that one?

Interviewer:

No.

Participant:

No? Well, that's a big celebration for one of the Indian religions and they would have a festival that weekend. So, we would help with that so they could lay on a party. If you know Diwali, Diwali they used to have over at [inaudible 00:20:19] where the boxing and the [inaudible 00:20:22], and that would be a big party and everyone would be invited to that.

So, it wasn't just about one religion or one group of people. It was involving everyone, and everyone got treated the same way, which was good. If you wanted to go on the holidays, you could go on the holidays. If you wanted to go away for the weekend, you could go away for the weekend. If you wanted to play sport, you could play sport. If you had a big festival or party... And that's how it evolved. It doesn't work like that so much now, but that's what it was like up until about 2004. I left in 2007.

Interviewer:

What were the difficult things about your work?

Participant:

The difficult things? Depending on the time of year, some of the workload could be very heavy. Christmas. There's lots of stuff coming from all over the world, and it all ended up in Mount Pleasant. It all ended up in piles and piles of parcels all coming from Greenland from a man called Santa Clause. You're a bit too old to be told that story. In its day, Mount Pleasant was handling 24 million items a week. That's a lot of mail. Parcels and letters, Christmas cards from all over the world. So, it could be quite tight to get things out and it could be quite strenuous if you was putting on the tipping of the bags and the unloading of the containers.

Interviewer:

Can you tell us about any discrimination you experienced or witnessed?

Participant:

Discrimination? Obviously, there's discrimination in all walks of life. How can I put it? It may be strange now, but we didn't have it like people talk about it now because we was all working together. And you had to work together. It's no good having someone there that's treated differently to how you are. We had jobs to do and we had a job to finish. Now, if you didn't finish the job, you couldn't just blame someone for doing it. You all got the blame. That's how it was run in Mount Pleasant. It's very similar to the way the forces are run now, if you think about the armed forces.

Obviously, so people thought that, maybe, women got treated better than men. Maybe some people may have got on because he was friends with the governor or an inspector, as we used to call



them then. They may have thought that your friendship was a little bit too close. But it was a very friendly place to work for.

Interviewer:

Tell us about a story that stands out from your working life. A story that stands out [crosstalk 00:23:13].

Participant:

Story that works out for my... One of the big stories, we took over 300 people to Florida. Because we was all working shifts and we all knew each other, the sports club decided we was going to do this big trip to Florida. In that time, it was that long ago, that we couldn't all fly into the same airport. We couldn't all stay in the same hotel because of the families. So, we had three flights out. Some went to New York, some went to Tampa, some went to Miami. We had three flights back. We had one hotel. We purchased all the tickets for Disney over here. Animal Kingdom wasn't about. It was just Disneyland and Epcot and we went to Busch Gardens, as well.

One of the other stories that sticks out to me is the nicknames that we used to give our governors or our inspectors or our assistant inspectors. So, Essex. Essex had quite a famous earl back in the pre-Tudor times. Have you done much history at school? Do you know pre-Tudor times? There's someone called the Earl of Essex. Yeah? That was his nickname because he controlled the Essex division. So, we called...

We had another guy was very flamboyant, so we called him Strictly Come Dancing. He had a nice suit on and he'd have a flower or a hanky hanging out his pocket. You could spot the governors because they wore suits and we wore uniforms. So, we would give people friendly nicknames like that.

Interviewer:

What were some of the naughty things people did at work?

Participant:

What are the naughty things people done at work? If you've got a jacket on and you've got one of those seals with clips on it that's meant to go on the bags, if you was pretty light fingered you could click it to someone's jacket and just write down the back of it kick me or something like that. Or you would take the inside of someone's pen out so they couldn't write the dispatches. It was silly little things like that, nothing too strenuous. There was the odd occasion where people got put in big bags or the van shutters would be shut down on someone, but you would never allow it to get out of hand because it would have been construed as bullying and it wouldn't have been fair on them.

Interviewer:

Talk us briefly through the different jobs you did while working for the Royal Mail.

Participant:

Different jobs I did? As I said, I worked on the sorting machines. I worked on hand sorting. I worked on parcel sorting. I worked on foreign mail sequence, which is the sequence when the work comes in from all over the world. It has to be put in order of tips. So, if something comes now, it's got to go on the dispatch at 10:00 at night. You couldn't bring something in at, was at 6:00? I worked on the platforms. I worked on the driving... Not the driving. I didn't do driving. I worked on the divisions. I went to PHG,

then I reverted back to postman because, at the time, I couldn't afford to take the promotion, which seems silly now.

And then, towards the end of my career... I spent nearly 10 years on nights and then an opportunity came up to work in the resource center. I've got, I would say, pretty good skills in numeracy and I was doing the balance of force, which is how many people you need to do one job. I was working on annual leave, making sure everyone got their leave that they was putting in for. I worked on manpower.

Now, manpower was when we first got computers to align people to annual leave. It was called manpower, even though it included ladies. It was called manpower, even though it included ladies, just so you could see how many people were working in what area of Mount Pleasant. And then, again, I was chairman of the sports and social club. So, I had quite an enjoyable time in my 21 years there. Very enjoyable time.

Interviewer:

Tell us about your favorite job.

Participant:

My favorite job? My favorite job would have been in the book room on annual leave, because you had an opportunity to help people. Annual leave was allocated on seniority. So, if you was number one, you got what you wanted all the time. If you was number 3,001, you didn't necessarily get the leave you wanted. But there was a way of swapping it around when vacancies come up, and you was always able to help people out. So, most people got what they wanted through the year.

Interviewer:

How did you progress in the Royal Mail?

Participant:

How did I progress? I probably could have progressed a lot further than I did, but I stayed as a postman. I did, at one time, go to Postman Higher Grade. I reverted back to postman, but I worked in the resource center as a postman. Which was very similar to the ladies you've got out the front on the reception. They're seeing people coming in and they're doing jobs and they're allocating classroom space and teaching space and stuff that the instructors and teachers need here.

Interviewer:

Tell us about your relationships with your colleagues.

Participant:

My relationship with my colleagues? I had a very good relationship with my colleagues. Very friendly people. People used to go out with each other, used to meet up after work, used to meet up at weekends. People lived in the same towns. Because shift work isn't always as nice as some people would like it to be, you lose touch with other people. So, if you're working nights, you're the best person to go to a party with because you can stay awake all night and everyone else who works days is going to sleep. So, I had a very good working relationship with people there.

Interviewer:

Tell us about your experiences of joining clubs at work.

Participant:

Joining clubs at work? As I said, I'm quite good with numbers. I used to play darts and I played darts at a high level. I represented the London Post Office in the nationals and we beat the... Four of us, two from Mount Pleasant, one from Middlesex, and one from Paddington, we won it in... I can't remember the year, but we beat the rest of the country, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales.

Some of the other good experiences we had, we done a lot of charitable work there, as well. One year, we raised enough money to purchase 15 puppies for the Guide Dogs Association. The year before that, we raised over 10,000 pounds for Great Ormond Street. So, we done a lot of charitable work there.

And the presentations. I enjoyed the presentations where the likes of... I wasn't a footballer, but the football team would play in the Home Counties League. We had three good football team. They used to play in the Civil Service League. And to go to the presentations and see your teams come out, that was always enjoyable, especially as being chairman of the sports club.

Interviewer:

Tell us about any opportunities to socialize.

Participant:

Opportunities to socialize? We used to do trips. We had social events all through the year where you could all bring your families. Some of them were what were known as dances, where the parents would go. Some of them were open to the children and the youngsters, as well. Twice a year at half turn, because not everyone can get away, we used to take as many people as we could to a holiday camp, Hayling Island, for instance, down in Hampshire. And everything would be laid on, so that we would make sure that all the dinners were paid for, the breakfast and the evening meal. The night entertainment was there. It was always of a good standard.

And people would mix. So, you would go around the tables and mix with each other. My two daughters grew up with my friends' daughters and sons, so all the children knew each other, as well, which was good. It was a bit different. They would all play together and the adults would all socialize, whether they was having a drink or going out to the town. Sorry. Is that all right?

Interviewer:

Yeah, it's okay. What made you join the union?

Participant:

At the time, it was advised to join the union. The union really looked after us, especially in the post office. They got us good working conditions. They got us shift allowance, annual leave allowance. We had respites, what you would call refreshment bites. They split the shifts so that you didn't do the same job for the whole eight or nine hours you was there. You had a variation of duties.

Along with that union in Mount Pleasant, we had a good welfare officer. We had our first aid sections. We had charitable associations. If you had any problems, you could go to the welfare officer. At one time. I think it finished just as I started. We had our own nurse and a post office doctor. And

there was post office catering. There was also a social area at the top of Mount Pleasant, which had a bar that would serve food. The restaurant food was of a good standard. It was good.

Interviewer:

Why is the union important for postal workers?

Participant:

The union was important for postal workers for representation on their wage structure, on their shift allowance, and on their health and their working conditions. Early conditions in the post office weren't that great. Although it was a good job to get, going back to the 1830s when it was reformed, there was a lot of dust. The transport was mainly horse drawn. The sacks were very thick cloth, and the paper... Paper now is recycled but before the recycling of paper, you used to get a lot of dust off it. So, you could get chest infections, your health could suffer. So, the union looked after all of that, and they tried to make it a fairer working environment and a better paid working environment.

Interviewer:

What part did the union play in your life?

Participant:

Quite a strong part, actually. Not being a union representative, but I always supported the union and what they was doing in fairness and trying to get better conditions. I always supported that.

Interviewer:

Tell us about any strikes or disputes you were involved with.

Participant:

I've been on several picket lines at Mount Pleasant. One of them was over what they called dress payments, which was taking bonuses off the big offices and spreading them out over the country. Rather than making everyone's wages fair and bringing them up, they decided they was going to take wages down in certain areas to share them out. There was quite a few disputes on conditions where people were overstepping the line of what was expected of you as a workforce. Also, two disputes I went on were over pay rises, enhancement of pay for better pay conditions.

Interviewer:

What was your most memorable moment at the post office?

Participant:

My most memorable moment? Maybe when I got one of my long service and good conduct awards after 20 years. That was quite memorable. Being elected as chairman of the sports club, that was quite memorable. The big thing I remember about it is the friendships.

Interviewer:

What was your most challenging moment at the post office?

Participant:

My most challenging moment? I'm registered disabled. I had a car crash many many years ago and I had to learn to walk again. So, I did struggle at first with some of the weights and the barrows and I don't think they was too... I'm not saying impressed, but the Disability Act in the 80s was a lot different to what it is now.

Interviewer:

Over your working life, what were the main changes at work?

Participant:

Main changes at work? Mechanization, automation, less people doing the same amount of work that was done before, job changes on the floor, uniform changes, conditions in the workplace. They were the big changes. When I started, 99% of the was done by hand. When I finished, over 70% of the work was done by machinery. And we never had computers to start off with. When I finished in 2007, there was a lot more computer enhancement and mechanization.

Interviewer:

In what ways do you think the job has improved?

Participant:

The job has improved? Hopefully, the workload has got lighter, the wages have got better for them, the conditions have got better. They're not so antiquated as what they were back in the 80s. And I think that, again, is down to the union. Also, mechanization. We're all a little bit shy of moving forward, but I think mechanization was a big step forward for the post office.

Interviewer:

In what ways you think it has gone worse?

Participant:

Sorry?

Interviewer:

In what ways do you think it was gone worse?

Participant:

Gone worse? Maybe the delivery times and the schedules for people. There used to be two deliveries a day for any house built before 1930. That's gone to one delivery, now. I think they've struggled with the competition. They haven't taken the opportunities that they could have done against the likes of Amazon, Hermes. Some of those other delivery firms have taken a lot of work off of the post office parcel section.

There's also the loss of work within the sub-post offices for the road tax that you used to buy for your car, the TV license. People used to go into the post office and treat it... They used to know their sub-postmasters or the BOs. They used to know those people. A lot of that work's gone. The post office should have been allowed to retain that work and they should have been helped by the government to

enhance their parcel delivery service because the post office could have been what Amazon is doing now.

Interviewer:

What would you think if your child wanted to work for the Royal Mail?

Participant:

My daughters and my son, they're a lot older than you guys. I would say it was a good job to work for, but take the opportunities to progress and take promotion. Don't just do what a lot of us done and stay there at the same grade. There's lots of opportunities in the post office for people to progress and you should embrace it and enhance it and try and move forward, if you want to. If you don't want to, that's fine. But if you've got the capabilities to do it, then I would say, yeah, do it. It's a good job.

Interviewer:

If you were the boss of Royal Mail, what changes would you make?

Participant:

If I was the boss of Royal Mail? Well, I'm not the boss of Royal Mail. The changes I would make would be try and get this help from the government to make them the premiere delivery service in the country. Now, everyone wants a little bit of the Royal Mail's workload, but they don't want the big workload. They don't want to take a letter up to Shetland or a letter down to somewhere in Sussex or one letter to Lancashire. They want the big stuff. They want the inner city stuff. So, I wouldn't let them carve that off again. I would say to them, "No, the Royal Mail is the Royal Mail," and give it the protection that it deserves.

Interviewer:

Looking back over your working life, what has working for Royal Mail meant to you?

Participant:

Royal Mail has meant a lot to me. It gave me the opportunity to purchase my own house. It gave me the opportunity to bring up my daughters, even though my wife, their mum, we split up when they was quite early. But it still gave me the opportunity to support them through their education. It was a good job to have. It was a good place to work for, and I really haven't got any regrets at all over it.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much for answering our questions. Is there anything you'd like to talk about that we haven't covered?

Participant:

No, I don't think so. It's been a good experience with all three of you. I know you've been doing the interviewing. The girl on your right has been doing the sound and the young lady on your left's been doing the film. I just hope you've enjoyed it. I hope you've got something off of it.

Now, when we was talking about sorting, I bought a-

Speaker 3:

Before you do that, we wanted to see if there were any other questions from the group.

Participant:

Yeah, sorry.

Speaker 3:

Are there any other questions from the group?

Participant:

You've got nothing else you want to ask me?

Interviewer:

You said all of it.

Speaker 3:

I want to ask you just about the... You worked on the Traveling Post Office?

Participant:

No, I didn't work on the Traveling Post Office, but I've been down there. It was one of the reserves could cover it, the Traveling Post Office. So, I knew how to get down there. I knew what the platform was like. Traveling Post Office, if you've seen the... It basically run from Paddington up in the West, all the way to Bromley-by-Bow in the East, took in six major sorting offices and two major stations. King's Cross. All the stations in London used to have post mail on them at one time for putting the mail on the trains.

But that was all linked together by this two foot gauge railway that was six and a half miles long under the streets of London, which isn't used now. The post office or any other major infrastructure within London could use that. It would take a lot of traffic off the road, a lot of delivery vans off the road, if they used it as what it was designed for, as a delivery hub. You've got six major drop off points and two major stations coming into London. All that stuff's in little white vans and gray vans going around our 365 square miles. A lot of it could be done underground.