

## Norman Candy Transcript

Ryann:

What is your full name?

Norman Candy:

My full name is Norman Candy.

Ryann:

What year were you born?

Norman Candy:

I was born in 1949.

Ryann:

Where were you born?

Norman Candy:

I was born in Mayday hospital, which is in Croydon.

Ryann:

What did your parents do for a living?

Norman Candy:

Right. My mum was a shorthand typist or a Dictaphone typist. She started off as a shorthand typist and she became a Dictaphone typist. And my dad, he actually trained as a lad-like laser doing colored church windows. But he got disabled during the war, not from getting shot or anything, he got TB and he couldn't do a manual job afterwards because he had a part of his lung removed. And he ended up working for the air ministry, at Biggin Hill Airport, as a surveyor's assistant.

Ryann:

Please tell us why you decided to work for Royal Mail.

Norman Candy:

Well I originally worked in the building trade, but I had a bit of a problem. I couldn't get any employment there because of trade union activity. I wanted a regular job, I had a young family I wanted a job that was secure with sick pay, pension. And that Royal Mail were advertising at the time in the London Evening Standard and I applied for a job there.

Ryann:

Interesting.

Speaker 3:

Could you just tell a little bit more about that back story about the thing that's going to feed in nicely later on about the trade union. Why couldn't you get work [inaudible 00:02:08]?

Norman Candy:

Okay. I couldn't get work because I was involved in the trade unions, in the building trade. And there was a lot of hostility towards active trade unionists at that time. And the employers used to call what they call blacklist. They would draw up a list of people they didn't want to work for them. They would exchange the details about these people, circulate them. And it made it impossible for certain people to get employment in the industry or the job that they wanted to work in. So basically they made you unemployed.

Ryann:

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

Norman Candy:

All right. Well, that's a good one because my great grandfather on my grandmother's side worked at Mount Pleasant around the corner here. And my granddad, he works at Mount Pleasant. My brother was what was known as a counter clerk in southwest London. I had an uncle who worked for the post office. And my granddad, by the way, was in during the First World War, the Post Office Rifles, which was a battalion. It was part of the London regiment. There was a couple of battalions that were made up of postmen and they fought in the First World War.

Speaker 3:

Do you remember Peter talking to you about that in the history session?

Ryann:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). What did your family members think about your decision to work for Royal Mail?

Norman Candy:

They thought it was a good idea. They thought it was a good idea because it was regular and it was secure.

Ryann:

Tell us how you started working for Royal Mail.

Norman Candy:

Well, I saw the advert in the Evening Standard or the Evening News. It was the Evening News then as well and filled in a form, sent it off, they contacted me and I went for an interview and a test, quite a simple test, this sort of memory and looking at different addresses and noticing things that were wrong. It was quite a simple test. I passed the test, got offered a job and started about a month later. Did a month's training in an office opposite King's Cross station. And then it was allocated to the office that I was in which was WCDO, that's West Central District Office, which was located in New Oxford Street.

Ryann:

Describe the training you did.

Norman Candy:

The training. They give you a set of cards with addresses on and you have to remember them and you have to learn them, the addresses from all around the country. Scotland, north of England, Wales, the west country. And you had to learn how to sort them and you had to do it at a certain speed. And after you got through the initial test, if you could do that and you could sort those cards up for those addresses, then you went through to the next stage. And the next stage was had they had what they called drop bag fittings, which were... You might have seen them on TV programs about the post office. They are post bags that hang on a frame. And you sorted bundles of letters into those and those bags were sent to the towns, whereas just the initial sorting was in your locality where you were going to work. But the drop bag fittings, you were sorting to different towns, different counties throughout the country.

Speaker 3:

We just waiting [inaudible 00:06:30]. Oh, they just gone on. They could feel me coming. Well done, Ryann. Carry on.

Ryann:

What was your first job you did for Royal Mail?

Norman Candy:

The first job I did for Royal Mail, I think, was basically working on what they call facing table. And the facing table was a long, long table with postmen and postwomen standing either side. In the middle, there's a conveyor belt and you basically just tipped the bags onto the table and put the letters onto the conveyor belt. And anything that was over a certain size, you put it up another bag. And that's the first job I did.

Ryann:

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

Norman Candy:

I felt a bit nervous. I think you were too, when you first started a job or you were doing something you haven't done. I felt a bit nervous but I quite enjoyed it because it was a six day week. The actual single day was fairly short and the shift that I was working on was from 1:00 at dinner time, just in the afternoon to 9:30 at night. So at 9:30 in the evening, it sort of went quite quick. And although I was nervous, I got to know people, got to make friends with people fairly quickly and after a while got over that.

Ryann:

Okay. Describe your work in those early days.

Norman Candy:

Very simple, basic work of just sorting letters into the sorting frames, putting packages into bags, tying those bags up and dispatching them, putting them on this chain which went round the building, huge mechanical chain where you hook the bags on and took it to the next floor where they did the next stage of the process.

Speaker 3:

Okay. Ask that question again.

Ryann:

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

Norman Candy:

It was good. I enjoyed it. There was a lot of funny people there. People cracking jokes and taking [inaudible 00:09:13] of each other and very friendly. It was good, I enjoyed it.

Ryann:

What kinds of people were you working with?

Norman Candy:

All sorts of people, men, women, people from every sort of background you can think of. It was people from Asia, people from the West Indies. I was quite young at the time, lots of people were older than me, but there was quite a few Jewish people were there. There was Irish people, every single conceivable people from every conceivable background you can think of worked there and every age from 18 to 65.

Ryann:

How diverse was your workplace when you started?

Norman Candy:

It was very diverse. Unbelievably, it was and that was at every level. I mean, the managers and what they call the middle management, a lot of them were people who had immigrated to this country in the 50s, worked their way through the post office. By the time I went there, they'd become supervisors. And there were a lot of women who were supervisors more than you got in it now. And there was a lot of Asian and a lot of people from a West Indian background at that time. And they were middle management, they'd worked their way through.

Ryann:

What sort of equipment did you use in your work?

Norman Candy:

It wasn't a lot of equipment really, other than what they call Miller Trucks. These are the trucks, you might have seen people wheeling bags around on these. There's a metal plate at the bottom, two wheels and handles. And you move the mail around on that. You had drop bag fittings where you put bags into. And there were mechanical chains that went round. And later on I became a driver and of course I had a van to drive. I drove a van around. So there wasn't that much equipment other than that which was in the building I've explained to you. And there were things like coding machines as well, where people sat and they put the post codes onto the letters with, I think, it's phosphorus dots on them so that another machine could read the address.

Speaker 3:

While you're on this, you were telling me about the New Oxford Street, how many people worked there, what did it sound like, what did it smell like? Could you just paint a picture for them?

Norman Candy:

Right. The office there was about 1300 people worked there on three shifts. It was to open 24 hours a day, six days a week. The only really time when it was empty was sort of Sunday afternoon where there was always a few people there, maintenance people. But that was the only time it was empty. The atmosphere in there was... People smoked at work in them days, you could smoke at work. And so there was the smell of tobacco in the canteen. People smoked in the canteen. They had a sports room there where we've billiards tables and table tennis and people smoked in there.

You had a library where some people used to go and sit and read. You also had a shop there where it was run by the Sports Association and they sold I don't know why exactly but huge jars of pickled eggs, pickled onions, red cabbage and various other things, massive jars this big. And they sold sweets, loads of sweets and cigarettes. I suppose it was dusty as well but you didn't really know, you see because people didn't really worry about those things in them days that they do so much now.

The bags, some of them were filthy. You can imagine [inaudible 00:13:36] and that's at collection, there's a pillar box, put the bag down in the street. The streets were filthy, empty the pillar box, put the work in there and then you repeat that all the way around the collection. I mean, those bags were filthy, but you didn't really take a notice of them.

Speaker 3:

What about sound? What did it sound like?

Norman Candy:

It was quite noisy because you got this chain. Yes, it was quite noisy for most of the time. But then there were quiet times when you were waiting for a collection to come in. The collection to come in, massive vans coming in from all over the west central area, come into [inaudible 00:14:15]. It was all done at high speed, that's screeching, they put it on the bank, the chain would start up, other people would attach it to the chain and the chain made it fantastic. It was quite noisy and that went all around the building, dropping bags off at particular points. But it was a noisy environment.

Ryann:

Describe your uniform.

Norman Candy:

Oh, dear. The first uniform was absolutely terrible. There was no difference between the summer uniform and the winter uniform, and it was as though the winter was the coldest winter that was ever going to be. And it was thick and it was hot and you weren't allowed not to wear it if you were out on delivery and it was dark blue or black and very, very uncomfortable. If you were working inside, you had to wear the trousers, but then you could wear a light jacket or you could wear a T-shirt. So it was a lot cooler working, you weren't so hot if you worked inside.

When you started there, they gave you a uniform which never fitted you, it was much too big. Then they gave you, believe it or not, a towel and a chunk of soap. It was about that big and it was green

and that was meant to last you, well it did last you forever because no matter how you tried, you couldn't get [inaudible 00:15:57] on it. It was like you wash your hands with a brick. They gave this to you, this was part of what we got. And you got these, what they called the wet gear. And they were the most uncomfortable and sort of top appalling sort of stuff that you wore over you if it rained. But no one ever did because it was too uncomfortable. You probably go out and get wet. And that was it.

Then it changed. Again, the union, this is quite interesting actually, the union campaigned for a winter uniform. So they made a lightweight winter uniform which people liked. And it was a far more comfortable sort of a light material. Then some people, because remember in these days it was very unusual for men to wear shorts. But when people started going on holiday wearing shorts on a holiday, when they came back here they found them comfortable and they came into work who short on and got sent home, "You can't wear shorts here. It's not part of the uniform."

And there were a couple of disputes between the men and the women who worked there and the managers who said you can't wear shorts and they said, "Well, we're going to wear shorts." And in the end, management conceded and they allowed you to wear shorts. But they said they had to be the same color as the uniform and you have to wear long socks with them. Of course no one ever wore the long socks. And they gradually got to a situation now where if you look around, no one wear shorts more than postmen and postwomen, they all wear shorts because it's the most comfortable wear. Even in the winter they wear them, if you have a look around you'll see them.

And they do it because it's the most comfortable way of working. But they had to threaten to taking strike action to bring that about. And I actually know some of the people who were involved in that. Friends of mine who were the first people to actually insist that they should be allowed to wear short shorts.

Speaker 3:

Can you [inaudible 00:18:16]?

Ryann:

Yeah.

Speaker 3:

Okay. [inaudible 00:18:20]. You go ahead.

Ryann:

Tell us about what skills you needed for your job.

Norman Candy:

Skills. Well, you had to have a good memory.

Speaker 3:

What was your job? Tell us, what was the name of your job? What was it?

Norman Candy:

A postman? It was just postman. You had postman drivers and then you had what they called PHGs, Postman Higher Grade. They got extra money and on their uniform they had a crown. You know the

crown of England, of Britain or whatever? They had the crown and they were a little bit more skilled. They did some of the clerical work, the writing down work, not management but organizing work. But you had to pass the test to become a PHG. I never bothered, I was quite happy to be a postman.

And the skills you needed were sort of, I suppose you had to be disciplined because you can't have people not turning up for work when people are waiting for their mail. And the memory, I'll say, a skill getting along with people, that's quite a big skill and an important one. And that's about it really. You had to be fairly fit as well because of the walking.

Ryann:

Describe a typical day at work.

Norman Candy:

Typical day, it depends what shift you are on. The typical day for a delivery postman, because that's the ones that you've all seen... A delivery postman will probably get up about 4:00 in the morning. And in central London, the vast majority of postmen, this is where you live and where this is, they don't live in central London. They probably live in places like Bermondsey, Croydon, Watford. They live in the outskirts.

Their parents probably lived in central London but people move out. And so they'd to commute in on the underground. They get up about 4:00 in the morning, get a train or get the underground and they'd arrive... Get up at 4:00, probably leave about half four or five, get a bus, train or the underground to work. Get into work, maybe if they are lucky have a cup of tea before they start. Sort the work, sort the general mail for about an hour, then they go for a cup of tea. They'd come back, go on their own particular walk where they had subdivided the work that they'd sorted earlier. They then tie that work up, put it in their bag, go and deliver it.

When they finish that delivery, they come back, they'd have their breakfast in the canteen. And a fantastic breakfast, really cheap breakfast. Most people liked fry ups, I know it's frowned on now, but most people will have a biggest fry up they could get. A cup of tea, and then they'd go out on their second delivery, which would be a lot lighter, and then they'd go and they sort that out, go on that delivery and then they'd probably finish about 1:00.

Ryann:

What were your favorite things about your work?

Norman Candy:

Favorite things were the people that I worked with. That was my favorite thing. They were good people.

Ryann:

What were the difficult things about your work?

Norman Candy:

The difficult things, I don't want you to take this wrong, but the management, the managers, the supervisors. A lot of them had been postmen and postwomen before, not all of them but some of them. I think the majority of them were probably okay. But there were some of them that were [inaudible 00:22:34] bullies. They tended to be bossy, bossing people about rather than persuading people or

talking to them in a friendly way. Not all of them, though, I must say. The majority were probably okay, but a minority, the way I used to put it, their promotion had gone to their head.

Ryann:

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

Norman Candy:

Yeah. There was a couple of things that occurred during the time, as a union official, this was. Not as a postman, when I was a union official and in south East London. There were two black postmen who were being bullied by a manager who obviously didn't like them because of their race. The union there found out about this because they were members to the union and they went to the union. I went to senior management, try to get something done about it but nothing happened, they kept the manager there. In the end, they came to me and we said, "Right, we're going to do something about it."

And we held a ballot, a vote of the members that unless they move this manager, unless they do... I'm talking about 1980s here, unless they moved this manager or do something about it, our members were going to go on strike. And they didn't do anything about it and went on strike only for one day to just test the water and their management started to move. And they moved the person out the office. Now, funnily enough, Dispatches made a program about it. It's a TV program, this thing is still going. They made a program about it, I was interviewed in it. The thing is, I'm not saying that everyone gets on with everyone but if you work with people in the post office and people see you being bullied, no matter where you come from, whether you're male, female or what your background or ethnic background is they will stick with you if they think you're being bullied and they will stand up for you. If the people in the union take it seriously and do the right thing.

Now, I'm not saying there's not instances where that doesn't happen, but I've got to honestly say that it's something that amongst the ordinary workers in London, the ordinary workers in the post office of London, I didn't hardly see any antagonism between people from different backgrounds at all. I only saw it at that level with managers who had a bit of power using it against people they didn't like. And the union reacted to it and we sorted it out.

Ryann:

Okay. Tell us a story that stands out from your working life.

Norman Candy:

Oh, dear. That's a difficult one. Stand out, all right. Well, I don't know if you'll find this funny, but it's like an in-joke. There's a group of... They were called messengers and they were young postmen and postwomen or youngsters, 16 years old, 15 years old, starting with the post office. And they were called messengers and their job was to deliver telegrams and import letters on foot around this area and other areas. But the older postmen used to, what we call, wind them up. Take [inaudible 00:26:49] them. And they used to get these youngsters and say to them, "Look, there's the mail that's coming in. You've got to go on the roof and wait for the helicopter to come in with the air mail."

And of course, it was made out. There wasn't a helicopter and the air mail came into Heathrow Airport and was brought in with a bag. But there's things like that, that they used to do. And I mean the whole thing was like a story, really. But that's just one example of the sort of thing that used to go on. It was all done in a friendly way as well. And as soon as the person found out, they're standing on the roof



for... Not all of them fell for it, but some did. And they went out there and then they'd come down, "When is this helicopter coming." And everyone would laugh at you.

Ryann:

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

Norman Candy:

Oh, dear. Well, some people had too much to drink. They'd go to the pub and they'd have too much to drink. Others would play tricks on each other. Hide some of the equipment the people use. But there's not that many naughty things other than that. I suppose the naughtiest, the worst thing that they did is people who had too much to drink, unfortunately, and came into work and shouldn't have been at work.

Ryann:

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

Norman Candy:

Right. I did a job as a postman. I didn't do that many deliveries because I preferred to work inside in the main office in North Street. So I did deliveries, I delivered around this area a couple of times. Mainly worked inside on the facing table, tipping bags on the chain, putting the bags onto the chain. Then later I became a postman driver and I used to drive a van round taking work from Oxford Street to Mount Pleasant up the road here and also going around this area, clearing pillar boxes.

Ryann:

Okay. Tell us about your favorite job.

Norman Candy:

My favorite job would have been on the facing table because it was a laugh and everyone used to crack jokes and it was good.

Ryann:

How did you progress in Royal Mail?

Norman Candy:

Well, I didn't actually progress in Royal Mail other than I started off as a postman and I finished as a postman but I became a union organizer and I progressed through that. Locally first, then I became a London representative, then I became a national representative and I ended up, for the last seven years of my life working at the union's headquarters as a policy adviser to the general secretary.

Ryann:

Tell us about your relationships with your colleagues.

Norman Candy:

I think on the whole they were very good. There's always a few people that you don't get on with. There were people there who were a bit loud, a bit bossy but vast majority of people, good, decent people.

Ryann:

Tell us about your experiences of joining clubs at work.

Norman Candy:

Clubs at work. I was only in one club the time I was there. And that was the debating society. Believe it or not, we had a debating society. And when I retired, someone gave me, I won a cup at debating. I had to defend Oliver Cromwell, which was quite difficult because it was quite a few Irish people there. And if you know the history of Oliver Cromwell, he wasn't a friend of the Irish people. So anyway, I won it for that and that was the only club and it was good. There was a pub opposite where we used to have the Royal Mail and stay after work in the evening and go over there about 20 people and have debates.

Ryann:

Tell us about any other opportunities to socialize.

Norman Candy:

Oh, well there was quite a few although I don't think there are so many now because they had football teams. You could socialize in the football team, you could socialize in the... If you were good at billiards or snooker, table tennis, they even had pigeon shooting club. At the Mount Pleasant up here when I first started, I don't know if it's there now, they used to have a shooting gallery in the basement. And people used to go down there and fire rifles at targets. And then you add, when I first started there, they had a horticultural society which people had their allotments and they used to bring in carrots and cabbages and put them on the sidewalk. And the postmaster would come round and judge them.

And I always used to say, "Well, how do we know that he didn't buy them carrot down at [inaudible 00:32:46]?" But it was a really good atmosphere like that. You had a library, you had a sports association. People met each other outside work and then you used to get... At Christmas, if you had children you could bring the children up and the Sports Association used to take them to one of the theaters in the West End for a [inaudible 00:33:12]. The Sports Association you had to pay in to be a member. Very small amount, like a very small amount, 10p a week ago. And that would pay for the children and you'd get like two coach loads of children with their parents go to one of the theaters.

And so [inaudible 00:33:33] with my kids and that was down in Oxford Street, crossroads between Oxford Street and [inaudible 00:33:43]. And they used to do that sort of thing. Fantastic. Oh, and the other thing they used to do, Christmas, they used to, in conjunction with Camden Council, when they sat in council, invite my old aged pensioners to a Christmas party led on by the postmen and postwomen and PHGs. And they'd provide food, a comedian and a bit of music. And they'd be in the canteen, the West Central Office and the East London Camden Council used to bring them in their buses, mini buses. And it was a massive competition between the old people to get a ticket to go. And if you went last you can't come this year but you can come the next year. You just have to level it out so that everyone got a chance to come every now and again.

Ryann:

Interesting. What made you join the union?

Norman Candy:

Well, I was sort of brought up in a family where trade unions were very important. But even if I hadn't, I would have done it because I believe that trade unions are necessary to protect people from being

exploited and bullied. And also that they improve people's lives through bargaining on behalf of working people with a strong employer to get better pay terms and conditions. So, although I come from a family that had a... It was quite strong in the family, I also thought I would have done it anyway because it's such a good idea to be in a union.

Ryann:

What part did the union play in your life.

Norman Candy:

Oh, quite a bit. It took my life really after a while, my working life anyway. But they played a big part. They would educate me as well. Things that I did when I was younger that I did maybe out of anger or maybe out of... I did without that much soul and resented certain things. I also got involved in the union, what I found was that it was a little bit more than that. It was a little bit more than just being angry with the way that people are being treated, it's about having the skills to change that and to negotiate and to learn how to negotiate and how to improve things. And the important thing is how to get the support of the people you work with to achieve an objective without being a bully and without trying to force them to do something.

Ryann:

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

Norman Candy:

Oh, dear. Where do you want to start?

Speaker 3:

Just give a, I suppose, [inaudible 00:37:10]. Just give a flavor of the types of things that the union was working with, just two that stand out.

Norman Candy:

Okay. Locally, we had strikes over local issues such as people not being treated properly, we thought. People getting sacked when they had time off for sickness, which we thought was unfair. That'd be a local dispute. Then in London, big one we had in London was over London [inaudible 00:37:42]. We had in 1992, 20,000 people on strike in London and we achieved our objective. We got an increase. And that's in the history of the union it's quite important because the employer was trying to break the union at the time.

So not only did we win that dispute, but we also won a big pay increase for the people that we were representing. Then later on, at a national level, we had national pay disputes. We had national pay disputes and I was involved in a couple of them. We ballot the membership, get a yes vote and we normally took two or three days, maybe longer than that, a week's industrial action. Then they'd be negotiations and the settlement would be found. As a union, I think I would say this, but I think we're probably one of the most successful unions in the country in terms of how we've transformed a job which was very low paid into a job which... It is not easy to get a job in the post office in certain areas particularly in central London, because people go there and stay there because of the benefits they get from working there.

Ryann:

What was your most memorable moment at the post office?

Norman Candy:

Memorable moment. Let me think about it. Memorable moment. I suppose, something that sticks in my mind is coming in to work and being told that letter bombs have been found in the post. It was to do with the problems in Ireland and what have you. And that the building next to us, they had a bomb put outside of it and the building up the road next to the Oasis, they were defense buildings. And that always sticks in my mind because it was people were put in danger. But I'll tell you another thing that I once did.

I have to mention this building and this sticks in my mind. I mentioned there was a Ministry of Defense building on one side of the road. And on the other side of the road was the Cuban embassy. And I mis-delivered the work from the Cuban embassy to the Ministry of Defense and the work from the Ministry of Defense to the Cuban embassy. Now they see these are different countries, important buildings and important embassies. But I had noticed it before, someone said to me [inaudible 00:41:04]. Someone pointed out to me what I've done and I went back and before they'd opened the bags, I changed them back over again. And that always sticks in my mind because that could have been pretty embarrassing.

Ryann:

What was your most challenging moment at the post office?

Norman Candy:

Challenging moment. I suppose it was when I first started, learning the sorting. Being a bit nervous when I went in there but then getting to know people, it was that first initial few weeks in the job.

Ryann:

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

Speaker 3:

Maybe talk about the privatization just briefly.

Norman Candy:

Okay. Well, when I first started the post office and British Telecoms, people who supply the funds, etc, it was one business. It was called the GPO. And my contract of employment has got GPO written at the bottom of it. They then split British Telecoms off, the telephone side and privatized that. They left the postal side and the Kansas network as part of a government owned. And then later on in the late 1990s, the Labor government tried to privatize the post office. We defeated that as a result of, we had a bit of influence over the Labor government and they pulled back on it although they had drawn up plans to do it.

And then we got another change in government and conservatives got in. Actually, it was the coalition got into power and they decided to take out these plans that have been drawn up previously by the civil servants and the Labor government, put them out of the drawer and they privatized the industry. And that was very difficult for us to handle. But we did handle it and we got guarantees on

terms and conditions. And although we didn't want it to happen, we had to do the best that we could. They were the government and they were determined to do it. And our pension was under threat and there wasn't a lot we could do about it.

But probably a bigger effect than that really was when the mail was opened, the postal service in the country, in Britain and our whole of Europe was opened up to competition. Because when I started Royal Mail had a monopoly on letters, not on packets or parcels, had a monopoly. So you couldn't deliver a letter in anywhere in the country unless it mailed from Royal Mail, it's to do with having a universal service and the price of a letter going anywhere for the same price. And they opened it up to competition and we lost quite a bit of work. We lost more work as a result of that, more jobs as a result of that than we did than we did under privatization.

Ryann:

In what ways do you think [inaudible 00:44:35] improved?

Norman Candy:

Oh, pay. We worked less hours. It used to be 42 hours when I first started, six days a week. Saturdays were more or less everyone works six days, including Saturday mornings and now...

Speaker 3:

Can you turn off, it's buzzed a couple of times [crosstalk 00:44:56].

Norman Candy:

Is it? Oh dear. I didn't think of it.

Speaker 3:

Because otherwise just [crosstalk 00:45:21].

Norman Candy:

Yeah, I didn't realize.

Speaker 3:

It's just buzzed a couple of times.

Norman Candy:

Anyway. That's off. What was I saying? Oh, we used to work 42 hours, I think they work... Next, they are going to be on 35 hours within a couple of years, so it's gradually got better length to work and the pay's got better. And the overall terms and conditions have got better.

Speaker 3:

If you could just go [inaudible 00:45:53] but you said that the union [inaudible 00:45:55] the union moved from protecting overtime to improving basic pay. Can you tell Ryann a little bit about that. Just briefly.

Norman Candy:

When I first started to earn a decent living, you had to work a hell of a lot of overtime. I shouldn't have say a hell lot of overtime. You used to have a lot of overtime. So you'd be there from early in the morning till late at night. And it was very tiring, but if you wanted to pay your mortgage or pay your rent and have a holiday, you had to work these long hours. The union negotiated improvements to the basic pay that reduced the amount of overtime people had to work. And now in some areas, people just don't want to work the overtime because the basic price improved so much.

Ryann:

In what ways has it gotten worse?

Norman Candy:

Gotten worse. I suppose if I was still working for the Post Office, I would say that it's a lot stricter now because postmen go out with a hand-held, I don't know what they call this, a hand-held sort of machine which actually they have to register into what time they started, what time they... It sort of sends a message back to the employer exactly what they are doing all the time. And when I first started it was a lot easier. You went out and you were by yourself, you were basically your own boss. Once you walked out of the building as long you did the work, it was down to you. But now new technology has put a lot more control over individuals who work for the post office because they're able to monitor what you are doing very closely.

Ryann:

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

Norman Candy:

Oh, it's meant a lot. Now, I left school, I was nearly 16 when I left school. I had no qualifications. I worked in field and trade but then couldn't work there and I got a job at the post office and I bought my own house, took my children to holiday, I've got a pension now that I'm living on now. I'm not working, I get paid a pension by Royal Mail. It's given me a lot. I benefited financially in terms of what I've been able to have in my life. I've got a car and a nice house, one on my children went to university. I say that working for Royal Mail gave me that. But it also gave me an unbelievable amount of friends and colleagues that I still see now.

Ryann:

Thanks very much for answering our questions. Is there anything you would like to talk about that we have not covered in our questions?

Norman Candy:

Not really, I think you've covered everything. I just hope you found it interesting.

Speaker 3:

Should we go to the team for any more questions? Anna, anything occurred to you? Anything? [Donas 00:49:33], how are you doing? Any questions occurred to you?

Donas:

What was the highest rank you got in the...

Norman Candy:

It was just a postman. That's quite a good question, actually.

Speaker 3:

You could answer towards Ryann [crosstalk 00:49:48]

Norman Candy:

Oh, yeah. Because at one time you could join the post office as a messenger boy at the age of 14, believe that or not and you could go all the way through the ranks and become a postmaster. You could become an engineer, you could become a senior manager. Theoretically, you could be on the board of GPO. Gradually changed and it became more difficult for people to progress through the ranks and to become a higher grade, because they started bringing people in from universities, recruiting them directly to certain positions that previously had been done by people that were promoted from the lower ranks into those positions. So it was very easy at one time, but it's not so easy now.

Speaker 3:

I've got two quick questions based on something that you said. You talked about how Jewish people worked in the central office. I know now people tend to live in outskirts of London. Did they represent the areas they were in?

Norman Candy:

They did, yes. Even they do now. If you go to, say for example, an area where there's a lot of Asian people, you'll find that there's a lot of Asian people working in that office. If you go to somewhere like Brixton where there's a lot of people from West Indian background, you'll find that there's a lot of West Indians work there. East London, there was a lot of Jewish people live there and they worked in East London. But when you consider that it's only a bus ride to West Central from East London, it was 19 or 38, you can get and you're there in 10 minutes early in the morning. West Central was another place where a lot of Jewish people worked.

One of my best friends in the union was a bloke called Jonah Hill, his parents were... He's Jewish from Bethnal Green originally and he was a friend of mine. He was my partner in the union. We used to work together and get things done together. He was Jewish. There was a lot of older people that I didn't really know because I was young then, who were in their late 60s and were just sort of leaving the post office. They'd obviously joined after the war, I would have thought. And it's only a drive from East London to West Central. And that was one of the places. Chairman of the London District Council was a Jewish fella, the first district organizer that I met, a bloke called [inaudible 00:52:40]. He was a Jewish fella from East London. So East Londoners they got a bit of fire in their belly. And they don't stand for nonsense from people and they make good trade union leaders.

Speaker 3:

And just last one, just the general thing. Could you just tell Ryan about... The children have met people who worked in different parts of the post office, GPO, counters. Just got to run through all the different... You got postmen, just give a quick brief run for the different sort of work that people would have done for the post office.

Norman Candy:

Okay. There's a postman who you see out in the street delivering letters. You see the van driver who's driving around the streets in a red van, delivering letters, taking work out of pillar boxes. You don't see the people who are working in Mount Pleasant or working in sorting machines, tipping bags, sorting your letters in there. Then you've got the drivers, big articulated lorries, travel all over the country, go to Scotland, go to [inaudible 00:53:50]. 24 hours a day, you see them driving up and down following the road. That's another job at the post office too.

Then you get the clerical side, what they call the admin side. People who do the clerical work, the wages. They do things to do with people's health, sick records, discipline records. And they call that the admin grades. And then you get the post offices where people, I'm not talking about the small ones, I'm talking about the big post offices where you get counter clerks working behind the counter selling whatever they sell nowadays and doing passports and all that sort of thing. It's less than it would have... If you'd asked me this 40 years ago, I would have said it's a lot more, but it is reducing the different things that people can do because different parts of it are changing.