

CB: This is an interview on the 1st of February 2009 with Richard Roberts in Lixwm.

Richard, can we go right back to the beginning of your life and tell me when and where you were born?

RR: Yes, I was born in Denbigh.

CB: Just keep going.

RR: Ok.

CB: Where? When?

RR: In the infirmary in Denbigh, in January of 1935.

CB: Could you tell me what your parents did and—

RR: My, my father was the local post man, and my mother was a general housewife.

CB: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

RR: I did indeed. Sadly my only brother died in 1942. He was just 2 years old unfortunately. I had 3 sisters. 2 of them are still surviving.

CB: So what did your brother die of?

RR: Pneumonia. In those days it was pretty fatal and quick, I was told.

CB: This is before Penicillin isn't it?

RR: Oh, yes indeed, yes.

CB: Could you tell me, could you tell me where you went to school? Where you and your sisters went to school?

RR: We went to the local school. The local school is still there, but it's a private house now.

CB: Yes, continue, just keep going.

RR: From there of course we went to the high school in Denbigh when we were 11. After that of course it was a case of when we left school, we more or less went our own way, in employment and so on. I was mainly working on local farms, until at the age of 21. I started working in the Valley works at Rhydymwyn.

CB: Can I back track on a couple of things there with you? First of all, so you would have gone to school in Denbigh in 1946?

RR: Yes. There about, yes.

CB: So did you pass your 11 plus?

RR: I did indeed, to go there yes.

CB: And your other—and your sisters did?

RR: They did not I'm afraid. (Laughs) no they did not unfortunately.

CB: OK. So, but you had benefit of the education acts.

RR: Well I, up to a point, but I, I was, not very good in school I'm afraid.

CB: Do you remember the dentists? Cos it was mandatory then to--

RR: Yes. I do indeed. Yes. Yes. The dentist had one period, he used to come around the local schools. And ---

CB: So did you enjoy that?

RR: Not really, no. No.

CB: So did you find that the dentist were gentle chaps who took, took your---

RR: Yes, I think they were really, really and truly. They had to be because, to gain our confidence. Didn't they?

CB: So when did you leave school, Richard?

RR: I was 16.

CB: So that would be 1951?

RR: Yes, thereabouts. Yes.

CB: What did you do immediately you left school?

RR: I worked on local farms.

CB: Of course, you said.

RR: Which is the only thing I really knew in those days. Like.

CB: Yes. Ok

RR: Then I was just 21 when I got this interview and the job at Rhydymwyn.

CB: Ok.

RR: As a young naive driver.

CB: So you moved there in 51 as a driver?

RR: Yes.

CB: Was that when it was a food depot?

RR: No.

CB: A storage depot?

RR: I was employed by the Ministry of Public Building and Works In those days. We were doing all maintenance work there on the buildings and so on. There were 2 joiners, approximately 6 electricians and mates of course. About 4 fitters as I recall. There was a painter and a plumber that would be about it I think and a number of labourers and so on, as mates to the various trades.

CB: The function of the works at that time was as a buffer storage depot was it?

RR: Well it was a storage depot yes indeed. The buildings were all full of various different things. I quite remember of course. We were not allowed to say what we actually saw. We, we were employed under the Official Secrets Act in those days.

CB: So what did you see? Its fifty eight years ago. I, I can go look it up in the archive. What was there?

RR: Yes. Well, well in the bigger buildings they were full of lathes, and machine tools and so on.

CB: Oh yes?

RR: The lathes were continually being cleaned with oily rags and so on. And that work was done by the other depot, not ours, the Ministry of Supply.

CB: Ok.

RR: They were, they were sort of, the cleaners. Men and women of course were employed doing that sort of thing.

CB: So it was storage? It was not buffer storage then? It had appliances in there and this was in the time of the Korean War wasn't it? 1951?

RR: Yes. Are, yes, but I wasn't there in 51 was I. It was 57 when I got there.

CB: Sorry 57.

RR: Yes.

CB: OK and so at that time it was plant? They had different sort of Industrial plant?

RR: Yes indeed.

CB: Did they have sugar and flower and stuff like that?

RR: No, no, nothing of that sort. Nothing in the food line, no.

CB: So---

RR: They had medical stuff you know. For hospitals and so on, blankets and beds and various things that they stored behind the main office, and I think the idea of that was, the main office was heated by a little boiler and that was warm and kept the area warm for this type of stuff that is being stored there.

CB: Did--- so you went all around the site.

RR: Definitely, yes indeed.

CB: Did you go in the Tunnels?

RR: I did yes. I was, I was employed in the tunnels, only when they were being— the tanks were being emptied when they were being brought out.

CB: Ok.

RR: I was helping to move them into a position, with one of these large Muir-Hill dumper trucks.

CB: Ok.

RR: To see only way, I think, to move this heavy material into position for the low loader to reverse up to it. Isn't it?

CB: Do you know where? There are four tunnels and there are four cross sections in the tunnels.

RR: Yes.

CB: A, B, C and D. and as you went in the first one—so were you there when those tanks were in the first tunnel you went into--- the first, the first chamber you went across?

RR: Yes when I first went into the tunnels. Yes. The tanks where there.

CB: And the tanks in the first 2 were turned at 45 degrees. 90 degrees to the walls weren't they?

RR: Yes.

CB: And in the far chambers they were parallel with the walls?

RR: Yes. Indeed, yes and they were on a kind of plinth thing and the idea of that was that should there be a leakage in the tanks. The leakage would drop into the side of a plinth, and it would sort of drain away, presumably into the rock or whatever.

CB: The plinth wasn't concrete?

RR: Yes and then the tank was placed on the—on this plinth as it were, and if there was a leakage it would drop into the—

CB: Into the air vent. Drain into the air vent.

RR: Exactly. Yes.

CB: Yes, Ok.

RR: So that it would not drain under your feet as it were.

CB: Yes, yes.

RR: That's what I was told anyway. In those days.

CB: So, that must have been quite a big job and did they drain the tanks first, did they?

RR: I believe they were drained, yes, yes.

CB: The product, out of there was taken away? So were the false ceilings then in place? There was a metal ceiling in there.

RR: Yes, that is something that I cannot really answer, I really don't remember. I'm quite honest about that.

CB: Round these different tanks there was quite a lot of pipe work and so on, was there?

RR: Yes.

CB: And there were quite a lot of tanks in there. ?

RR: Yes.

CB: There was nearly a hundred.

RR: There were a large number of these, tanks, yes indeed.

CB: So were the air conditioning units still working outside at that time?

RR: Yes, yes it was.

CB: Was that noisy?

RR: Yes. It was slight—you knew it was there, yes. Oh yes.

CB: So when you walked past it, could you hear it?

RR: Well yes, you could hear—it was like a-- I would call it on the fan system.

CB: When you were in the tunnels could you know when it was running. Did you know that the air conditioning was turned on at the times you were in the tunnels?

RR: Well yes, I think we were aware of that of course because the sound was there wasn't it?

CB: Did you, did you see the ramp come down in the central tunnel when it used to go up above the ceiling?

RR: No. I never saw anything of that. No.

CB: Did you go up to the iron doors at the far side and see through there where the vents went up to the chimneys?

RR: No I didn't go that far, no. You see I was not employed there. I was sort of sent there to help to, to maneuver these tanks.

CB: Yes, yes. I'm, I'm just trying to expand the envelope you know to find more out. When you went in there did you have to wear protective clothing?

RR: This was the funny part about it. I was completely naïve in those days. All I had was a pair of glove. I didn't even have a hard hat sitting on the dumper. But the ICI employees, that were responsible for the actual job of moving these tanks, all I could see was their eyes.

CB: Ok.

RR: You know, I didn't really know--- there was no talking, it was like this.....

CB: Yes.

RR: With hand signals and when the job was complete, in other words the tank would be in position, the 2 ICI employees would walk to the bottom of the tunnel and one would hose the other one down and then the other one would be hosed down.

CB: But not you. (Laughs)

RR: Not me. (Laughs) I had no protection whatsoever. Perhaps today it wouldn't be allowed probably would it?

CB: Probably agree with you. So you went in there to position the tanks, in the central tunnel, not the outside tunnels, but the central one.

RR: Well the thing was we had, I had to go in to tunnels, number 1 and number 3. In other words, if you went down into number 3 you turned right, but if you went down number 1 you had to turn left and--- I cannot quite remember whether they came out from one tunnel or did they come from-----

CB: It's got to be the central one. It's the—they must have come--

RR: It was from the Centre.

CB: It must have come from the central one?

RR: Yes.

CB: Your job was to go in there and position the tanks, the empty tanks?

RR: Yes.

CB: Line them up.

RR: Exactly.

CB: In the central tunnel so they could be put on a low loader?

RR: Yes, so that he could reverse up and get his fully going and then away to go.

CB: He couldn't go round the corners with the lorry?

RR: No he couldn't. That was the idea and the big heavy dumper truck was the obvious thing, I think.

CB: So you dragged it out?

RR: Well actually we pushed it out, the employees of ICI had a large scaffolding plank against the tank, and they would be like this to me, come forward a bit.

CB: Ok.

RR: They would sort of maneuver this—this piece of wood. And eventually it would fall into place, wouldn't it?

CB: So, it rested on a sort of bogey did it?

RR: Exactly, a little bogey. Yes. If I remember right it was a bogey system on both ends with tiny wheels.

CB: Oh, Ok.

RR: It was just a matter of then, sort of getting it into position into the middle of the tunnel. So that the--

CB: So the clearance was very tight down there?

RR: Exactly.

CB: You didn't experience any rock falls or things like that?

RR: None whatsoever, No, No.

CB: Do you know anybody who was—saw any rock falls or experienced rock falls?

RR: I cannot recall. No.

CB: You were there for 12 years was it?

RR: Well I was there for about 13 years from the word go. Yes.

CB: So 57 to -?

RR: 71.

CB: 71. OK. As you went right around the site, this was in the 50's when they were clearing the last of the mustard gas out. Did you go down the DA? The danger area?

RR: Yes. I worked a lot down there.

CB: What did you do down there Richard?

RR: Well I was taking rubble mainly, on a dumper truck and we were tipping it in the wood there. Right in the bottom end.

CB: Ok.

RR: It was like a tip we had there for various bits of rubble that wasn't needed and so on.

CB: Rubble from where?

RR: From—well—various parts of the site, general site clearance. There was—there was [...] maintain the curbs and the roads and so on. Same as the council people do now, keep

the roads clean and there would be s tuff from the river as it were. The river bed, in the summer when there was no water there. That would be cleaned out with a crane, loaded on a dumper and taken into the woods,

CB: Down the bottom end.

RR: Down the bottom end. Just to--

CB: I know exactly where you mean and in the DA there had been some piles of spoil there in the war years. Where they still there when you were working there, sort of humps?

RR: Oh there was indeed. Yes.

CB: And what happened to those because there are gone now.

RR: They've gone have they?

CB: Yes, they have been moved. So you weren't involved in moving those?

RR: No.

CB: Were you aware of the covered walkways down there and could you tell me a bit about that?

RR: The only covered one I—I actually had to think was in the centre, off the asphalt road.

CB: Could you describe that to me? I'm told, that there where planks about 9 inches high on either side of the—

RR: Yes, of the roadway. Yes.

CB: Then it was open, and then there was a sort of covered roof on it. Does that make sense to you?

RR: No.

CB: You tell me.

RR: At this stage, No.

CB: You tell me.

RR: (silence) sigh.

CB: So were there sort of sides about 9 inches high?

RR: There was a wooden platform at the front-- across the edge of the roadway, on both sides.

CB: You didn't see it with—with a roof on?

RR: No I cannot. I can't quite recall that at the moment at all really.

CB: All of the buildings were standing down there?

RR: Indeed, yes.

CB: Between 57 and 71?

RR: Definitely they were all in the danger area then. Yes.

CB: And what where those buildings used for?

RR: In those days many of them were empty. Most of them had been empty apparently. They were being worked on. The corners were being repaired of the buildings and so on. I think where they had the asphalt roof, I think during the hot summer it would lift, and the brick work would be damaged, and that would be repaired, that would be a joiner and his mate of course.

CB: Ok.

RR: I would be taking the stuff down. Sand and gravel, cement and so on. We used to do various little concrete road repairs and so on. Everything was taken down by the dump truck.

CB: People weren't working down there. They were just being maintained for some sort of storage function?

RR: Yes. They were, I suppose realistically, these damaged building were being repaired, it was something to do I presume when the maintenance staff were there. It was a job for the maintenance staff and while they were there I presume they would have to do it. Wouldn't they?

CB: In the buildings towards the top, in the floor there are circles about 15 inches in diameter. Do you remember milk churns being stacked there?

RR: I don't really. No.

CB: I don't think it is milk churns.

RR: No I don't think they were. I can't. No I can't remember.

CB: There was a fence at that time right across the DA, from the—the place---

RR: From the effluent pit.

CB: Yes.

RR: To the main gate approximately. Yes. That was a high fence. Yes.

CB: And it was obvious.

RR: Yes, indeed yes.

CB: There was a guard— so was there a guard house?

RR: Yes in the bottom, there was in the bottom yes. It was never manned, I never remember that one being manned at all.

CB: Was there a canteen still there? Just at the back of the guard house or at the side of the guard house?

RR: Not at the bottom end. Not when, not when I was there. There may have been during and after the war perhaps. But not, the only canteen when I was there was up, opposite the garage near the top gates.

CB: On the far side. Can you tell us anything about the effluent pit?
Can you recall it being there?
Can you recall it running?
Who worked on it?

RR: Yes indeed. There was a chap, a local man, Joe Knowles was running it. And what I remember about it of course was it was a massively deep pit about 50, 60 feet deep I should imagine. With machinery and so on in it. But I never actually worked inside so I cannot say really what was happening there at all.

CB: Can you remember it running?

RR: Well yes, it was running.

CB: Did you hear it?

RR: Yes, yes.

CB: Did it make a big noise?

RR: Well it was quite noisy yes. Of course the effluent line as we've seen. I actually worked on that effluent line during the summer months, cutting the grass and generally keeping the stiles and so on tidy and so on.

CB: Did people walk that?

RR: I don't know really. That I cannot say.

CB: Were you told that a guy used to walk it every day.

RR: The effluent line?

CB: Yes.

RR: I shouldn't think so. Not to my knowledge no. I don't think so.

CB: When it was pumping they used to set the sluices,

RR: Yes.

CB: They used to go and release the sluices. Pump it up to the top of the hill, get a pipe full, put the sluices in and jam them when the tide turned.

RR: Probably yes. I don't know exactly how the system worked of course. I know there was a man there full time. A full time job in the pit itself like.

CB: Do you remember the pumping engine breaking down?

RR: No. not really no, I can't remember that.

CB: Do you remember the south tunnel, the southerly tunnel. I'm just thinking as we go north at the site.

RR: Into the

CB: Tunnels.

RR: Yes.

CB: Do you remember the south one, as you went in the south one, can you remember going in there. On the right hand side there was some device with a pick there and a tank with a chimney on it?

RR: (long silence) phew. I can't say I remember that exactly. I must have driven through it dozens of times. Yes.

CB: Just to the left of that tunnel wasn't there an adit there. Which I'm told got filled in with 100 tons of rock at a later time.

RR: Good grief. I didn't know that.

CB: Where the K buildings still in use then?

RR: Yes indeed. They were busy, yes.

CB: What went on in the K buildings?

RR: K4, K4, K5 and K4a, they were filled with heavy machinery.

CB: I see.

RR: Lathes and so on. Big machinery and so on.

CB: Was the steam somewhere in there?

RR: Yes.

CB: So the boiler house was banging away?

RR: Well the bunk—boiler house was just below wasn't it?

CB: Yes and when you looked at-- when you looked at the boiler house and the substation, the big substation at the side of it where all the electric went into.

RR: Yes.

CB: That was still going away?

RR: Indeed yes.

CB: As you came further up the site. What happened in P4, P5 at this time?

RR: They had machinery and so on.

CB: Did they?

RR: Yes, yes, yes. When the P buildings were being emptied, they were being emptied by a company, in those days, known as British Road Services.

CB: Ok.

RR: From Queensferry I believe.

CB: This is to empty the plant?

RR: Yes, taking the heavy machinery away.

CB: Were the chimneys still standing outside the buildings about 60 feet high?

RR: Indeed they were. Yes, yes indeed, yes.

CB: Somebody told me that when they took one of those down rooks had nested in the top of it, and there were dozens of rooks coming out as they took it down.

RR: Good grief.

CB: Can you remember a building R4, which was by the tunnels on the corner there with a big chimney at the side of it? There's P4, P5, P6 and R3 and R4. And R3 was just where you turn round the corner now, parallel with P4.
(Long pause)
It don't matter. It doesn't matter.

RR: I can't remember the R buildings being [...]

CB: Well they were insignificant in comparison with the other big ones.

RR: They were obviously there. Yes.

CB: Do you recall the canteen at the top?

RR: Very well. Yes.

CB: How many could you get in there? At a push. You know.

RR: Ooh, well---

CB: Standing and listening to people.

RR: I suppose you could seat about 30 I am sure. More, I'm sure.

CB: Could you?

RR: Yes I'm sure.

CB: You can't imagine a few hundred going in there and listening to people?

RR: I could be wrong of course. It's a long time. I used to use the canteen, but many people didn't. They used to have sandwiches and so on.

CB: Of course.

RR: Yes.

CB: Of course.

RR: I do remember it very well. Yes.

CB: Do you remember what P6 was used for when you were there, the one on the left hand side by the culvert going north? The other P building, which stands on its own. There's 2 together and one on either side.

RR: P6 is the one on the right I think, isn't it walking down?

CB: Yes.

RR: Well there is a rumor that that's where the bomb started off. Was it?

CB: It did.

RR: In P6 I believe?

CB: It definitely did but after 1945 there was no connection.

RR: No, no. I can remember in that particular P building putting a ramp up to the door.

CB: Oh yes?

RR: Yes, into the door, P6.

CB: Up from that were the offices and the labs and so on.

RR: Yes well---

CB: What used to be the labs?

RR: The main office was practically by the main gate, wasn't it? As you walk in. and then to the left, further down to the left was the clocking in and where we used to clock in and so on and to the left there was the ambulance and fire service station there. Then opposite there was the electric shop. I believe they've gone, been demolished I believe.

CB: We'll take you down.

RR: I think the canteen's gone as well.

CB: Everything.

RR: Then lower down was the fitting shop, and opposite was the garage.

CB: OK.

RR: Where we used to park our cars and so on in the garage.

CB: Well the garage is still there.

RR: Still there is it?

CB: Yes. Different roof, but same building.
Can I ask you now, separately about the tunnels? Because after 1959 when all of the mustard gas went out of there, could you tell me what happened to the tunnels after that?

RR: Well, personally, the only thing I can recall then is repairing this massive wall. This damp wall you know. It was concreted if I remember from the bottom right to the top like. There must have been hundreds of tons of sand and gravel used. But after that I cannot— I have no idea what happened after that.

CB: You don't know who worked down there and who was responsible for it?

RR: Well.

CB: Between say 59 and 71?
Were different people imported to work in the tunnels?

RR: I don't think they were you know because when I left it was still under the Ministry as it were. It was after that, that the food people came in wasn't it, Defra and so on, I think if I recall rightly.
I don't think.

CB: MAFF, MAFF

RR: MAFF, that's right. Yes.

RR: I don't think. I can't think that anything was going on in it [...] really.

CB: Can i go back with you a bit now?
So you were born in 1935 and you lived in Denbigh?

RR: No. I lived in Bodfari.

CB: in Bodfari, close to Denbigh.

RR: Yes.

CB: I was going to ask you, do you remember food rationing and all of those things and what was your experience of it?

RR: Oh gosh yes. Indeed yes. As a boy, yes.

CB: Did you have a radio?

RR: Just about yes.
With a wet battery thing system you know.(Laughs).

CB: There were 3 programs weren't there?

RR: Was there? I don't know. I can't remember.

CB: Just let me try. There was the Light Programme,

RR: Oh yes. The Light Programme.

CB: Workers Playtime and all that.

RR: That's right yes.

CB: The Home service.

RR: The Home service. Yes.

CB: Trying to educate you and the third program which was classical music.

RR: Yes

CB: (Laughing). My granddad used to play that.

RR: Did he?

CB: I'm sure he only used to do it to impress people. I can always remember there was a Counter Tenor called Alfred Deller and him being a miner always thought that counter tenor's must be gay, you know. And when he used to sing he would puff on his pipe and go tsk, tsk, tsk.

(Both men laughing).

CB: Did you get papers and so on or was it just local papers you got?

RR: Just the local papers. Wasn't it? Yes.

CB: Most of your information came from the Church and your local shop I guess eh?

RR: That's right. Yes, yes, yes.

CB: I wonder if you're aware if people smoked and drank much.

RR: I think it was pretty general wasn't it in those days, I think. Wasn't it? It was probably the done thing.

CB: Do you remember what people generally smoked ?

RR: Yes, they used to cut it. Cut the tobacco and put it in a pipe didn't they? I remember my grandfather smoking.

CB: What type of cigarettes?

RR: Woodbine, wouldn't they. Oh yes, Woodbine.

CB: Do you remember the smell of Pasha's?

RR: Yes, I remember the name.

CB: Turkish.

RR: Yes probably.

CB: And Paffing clouds?

RR: Passing clouds?

CB: Paffing. It's like a fff on the front. And they were oval.

RR: Probably yes.

CB; So was there a pub in Bodfari?

RR: Yes. I believe, I believe there was about 5 pubs in Bodfari then. One of them was in the Aberwheeler which is just on the outskirts of Bodfari. It was a shop come pub. If you understand what I mean?

CB: Yes.

RR: It was-- my father said it was forced to close because, for example, you or I perhaps would go in at say 10 o'clock in the morning and you'd say "oh I want a loaf". You go into the shop, but you didn't really want a loaf, it was an excuse to go from the shop to the pub. You'd have a few jars and then apparently the authorities said to them "look you must block this door up because people are coming into your shop going through this door into the pub. Back again into the shop buying a loaf and going home a bit tipsy". He refused and I believe my father said it was closed full stop. I don't remember it there. I remember 2 pubs going there. One closed about 18 months ago now. I believe.

CB: Do you remember being full?

RR: Yes I do. Yes.

CB: Did they get the kids some lemonade to drink outside?

RR: well yes. It was easier in those days I supposed wasn't it, yes.

CB: Keep them quiet outside.

RR: Oh yes indeed, yes,

CB: Give them that and a packet of crisps, yes.

RR: It was yes. Well the local pubs in those days were pretty full.

CB: Nothing else.

RR: Nothing else and apart from that beer at what a shilling a pint, although there wasn't a lot of money about.

CB: Do you remember being hungry?

RR: To be honest no I don't. We were a very poor family. My father was crippled in the First World War and he was only able to do part time work. I remember us being very, very, poor but I can't remember being hungry.

CB: So what about clothing coupons and things like that?

RR: Yes I remember those.

CB: Did it affect you badly? You know you couldn't have a pair of trousers.

RR: I can't remember it being a problem really. But of course you see women in those days where dress makers as well weren't they? I remember my wife even she would make dresses and trousers for my children. But nowadays, you know, even if you have a pair of socks that's the worse for wear, you put them in the bin. Where as in those days they would be darned and so on wouldn't they?

CB: Well, ladies keep on mentioning the same thing to me repeatedly, we don't know where they got it from but towards the end of the war there was parachute silk and they used to make blouses out of them.

RR: I suppose so. Oh yes, yes.

CB: Do you recall VE day?

RR: I do yes.

CB: Do you? Was that a big event?

RR: I was in school yes.

CB: Street party and all that?

RR: I remember when VE day was announced. The headmaster I remember came into the classroom, clapped his hands and said (clapping hands) "good news war is over. All of you can go home now". And this was around lunch time as I recall.

CB: And VJ day?

RR: That was in Japan wasn't it?

CB: Do you remember the atomic bomb?

RR: Well I remember but it didn't mean much to me did it. You know. I don't remember at the time, had it happened today you're older and you know more, consequences and so on. Don't you really?

CB: Do you remember those post war winters, just after the war, the winters we had?

RR: Severe winters and so on yes. 47, I remember 47.

CB: Do you remember anything about that?

RR: I remember the roads were blocked completely weren't they? Not far from our house, I remember a bread van stuck in the snow. When it was recovered as it were, all the bread had gone of course.
(Both men laughing)

RR: Naturally because it would have been hard, rock hard wouldn't it if it hadn't been stolen?

CB: Course it would.
I remember, which perhaps, remember Denis Compton in there.

RR: yes I do.

CB: marvelous.

RR: Yes I do.

CB: 47 that was, wasn't it?

RR: Probably yes indeed, yes.

CB: so that was the winter of 47.

RR: There was the Compton brothers. When did they play football, didn't they play for Arsenal I think?

CB: And in 48 Bradman came over with all of that.

RR: Oh yes of course. Yes

CB: And Stan was in his prime then. Stan Matthews and Tom Finney.

RR: Well of course yes. Finney still going.

CB: Well he's a nice man isn't he? Sir Tom Finney as he is.

RR: Yes of course

CB: Do you remember the coronation?

RR: Yes. 53?

CB: 53. So did you have a TV?

RR: No.

CB: You're the first person I met who said they didn't have a TV.

RR: I didn't, I don't think we did. We didn't have, we didn't have electricity until, it must have been around 48/ 49.

CB: Ok.

RR: There about.

CB: You would have had an outdoor toilet then?

RR: It was outdoor yes. Yes

CB: The bath was a sort of tin bath you put---

RR: Oh yes, yes. We used to hang it up outside the front—from the door you know.

CB: Well Eric, Sir Eric Driver, had the same thing. My family where miners and they did that, and they did it when they came off shift because there was no pithead baths then. I was going to ask you, can you remember the toilet paper?

RR: The official toilet paper or:-

CB: No. no. what everybody used.

RR: The home made. Yes of course.

CB: What everybody used.

RR: Of course, yes.

CB: The pink cut into 4 sheets, cut into 4 and put through a hole on the bathroom door.

RR: That's right, yes,

CB: Do you remember the piping up to the outdoor toilet? For the winters and so on? All lagged with--

RR: Oh yes, with

CB: Sacking.

RR: Sacking and so on. Yes, yes, yes.

CB: Can you remember the soap you used, did it come in bars or was it?

RR: Big bars. Was it Carbolic, big green block wasn't it?

CB: Did you use to cut a bit off?

RR: That's right yes.

CB: Shampoos?

RR: No I can't remember shampoos.

CB: The tub outside to catch the rain water?

RR: Yes. Of course yes.

CB: Did you have a Dolly tub, and how did you do your washing and what day was it done?

RR: On a Monday morning yes. In the old dolly tub and so on.

CB: I've got to ask you, for Monday lunch did you have fry up from the Sunday? (Laughing) with the cold meat?

RR: On the Monday my mother would make, be doing the washing on the Monday and so on. And we would come home from school on the Monday afternoon and she would say it like this "it's a rough and ready dinner today" and that rough and ready dinner that we had, if you put it in front of a child today, they'd look stupid. It would be a slice of ham.

CB: Right.

RR: A big slice of ham, potatoes, mashed and a swede, or turnips they call them don't they. And we didn't have gravy as such. The gravy would come from the frying pan. That was a quick lunch.

CB: Yes.

RR: Brilliant wasn't it? Brilliant

CB: My mother and grandmother used to have some meat left over from Sunday. Cold meat, got the potatoes and the vegetables, you know, swede, swede's, cabbage and so on. Put it altogether in a frying pan. Fry it up.

RR: Yes of course, I've had that.

CB: Dead quick you know. And if you had some brown sauce with it was fantastic.

RR: I know, I know.

CB: When you got to the Coronation that was a big deal wasn't it?

RR: Oh yes. Indeed.

CB: You'd have been what?

RR: 18 would, 35, 45 yes 50, about 17, 18 yes.

CB: Can you remember how big a day it was and so on?

RR: Not really no. not really.

CB: So did you---

RR: No, to be honest.

CB: Did you watch it on TV?

RR: No.

CB: Didn't you?

RR: I suppose in—well I would have been working wouldn't I?

CB: Of course.

RR: You know. It was probably another day wasn't it really?

CB: Yes. It was a massive thing that year.

RR: it was. Oh, of course yes.

CB: So you went on the farm, and you've spent all your money in the pub and so on because you're so well paid.

Visitor: Some Paper?

CB: Please.

So then you'd gone to work at Rhydymwyn when you were 21?

RR: Yes, yes.

CB: You said you went out from there to various other places. Could you tell me some the places you went and what you did?
That's coming out of there?
What? Delivering things from site and so on? Did you?

RR: Yes.
Various places, Runcorn of course, ICI Runcorn isn't it?

CB: What did you take and bring from there?

RR: Well, if I told you I didn't know, you've got to believe me.

CB: OK.

RR: I didn't know. I would be sent for with a truck. Report to-- well say K4. Aye, OK.
They put 4 boxes perhaps on the truck. One there, one there, one there. OK mate. Off to go.
Now the next move would be to the main office block, onto the weigh bridge and then they would give us a sheet. Oh, where am I going? *Oh, Runcorn. What is it? 3 boxes.*
And they'd be sort of—wouldn't—there were 3 boxes.

CB: Richard, there was nothing secret about what you were taking. You know.

RR: Well that was the way, wasn't it?

CB: The stuff they were taking up to Runcorn and so on, I will tell you something which very few people know. There was no mustard gas in this country manufactured after 1945.

RR: No, no.

CB: So there's nothing secret there?

RR: No, no. but even so, it was a load of bull or what like. When I went there to work, I had to sign the official secrets act, stating that if I happened to spot something that I would not tell,, or what I was carrying so and so this. You know, I was taking something to somewhere.
There was an army camp near Rhyl, on the river there you know.

CB: Saint Asaph.

RR: well yes out of Saint Asaph. It's just off the marble church there.

CB: It was a junior training camp.

RR: Exactly yes.

CB: Kinmel.

RR: Kinmel camp yes. That's right yes it is still there. The site is still there of course. We would go there of course you see, and—

CB: I know why you'd go there. We can work it out.

RR: You didn't know exactly—well it didn't bother me really.

CB: With the official secrets act right, we've got the management notes for Randle up to 1959. So be assured the things you're telling me, most things are under the 30 year rule.

RR: Ah, I see.

CB: There is a reason to go back to, and we do have the minutes, the management minutes of the actual factory. So you are not telling anything which is compromising. And there's a bottom line in this, of course you find if it's not true, I'll come and visit you in prison and bring you a cake.

RR & CB: (laughing)

CB: Do you really think that people would come and take you now? Ah forget about it.

RR: No, no. It didn't bother me; it didn't really bother me at the time. Like I say I was a naive youngster. It was a job. It was 8 pound a week for me.

CB: You've told me nothing that could be compromising.

RR: I was making 4 pounds 10 shillings on the farm you see, and when I went to Rhydymwyn it was 8 pound. Bloody hell, 8 pound a week.

CB: When was that? 57?

RR: 57, 58 yes.

CB: Well it was reckoned at that time a 1000 pounds a year made you middle class and you were 8 pound a week.

RR: 8 pound yes.

CB: That's 400 pound.

RR: I was getting 50 —

CB: A house cost 800 pounds in those days

RR: I suppose so. Oh yes. 10, I was getting 10 shillings a week because I was a driver, a sort of bonus would you call it? I don't know. So I would be getting 10 shillings a week more than the laborer you know, working with me.

CB: Can I go back through a couple of social things with you? When you did grow up and you're in the 50's and so on, did you smoke?

RR: I did yes.

CB: What did you smoke?

RR: Cigarettes.

CB: What sort of cigarettes?

RR: Senior Service I think.

CB: OK.

RR: Mainly

CB: Did you drink?

RR: Yes I did. I was never a boozier. I used to have a drink yes.

CB: Social.

RR: Social. Yes, yes.

CB: And dances around then. Were there a lot of dances?

RR: Yes, yes.

CB: I have just sent an email with music by Johnny Dankworth called Experiments with 3 Rodents, you know, 3 Blind Mice.

RR: oh yes, oh yes.

CB: and Dicky Valentine was a star then wasn't he?

RR: Well of course then yes.

CB: Did you used to go to the dances in Mold or? Oh no you lived in Denbigh.

RR: Denbigh, Ruthin or Rhyl. You know.

CB: Did you have a car and so on in those days?

RR: yes, I had an old Morris 8.

CB: Wow. You had wheels.

RR: yes, yes.

CB: You were mobile?

RR: Well yes.

CB: You could spread yourself around.

RR: Well I suppose so, yes. Times were getting better weren't they, really, weren't they?

CB: We had the best of it people of our age group because we got the benefit of the Health Act and the Education Act.

RR: Exactly, yes. Because today, times are really tough I think for someone starting out if you like. It's not easy.

CB: They don't starve. There is opportunity for everybody but the problem is that there are limited jobs you can have.

RR: The actual situation in the country, well in the world if you like. Today is, it can be frightening I think. Cant it really?
I mean it doesn't bear thinking, I think when someone have, for example, being buying their house for 4, 5 6 years or more and suddenly they could bloody well loose the lot. It's really frightening that is you know.

CB: it's the rich that gets the pleasure, it's the poor that gets the blame.

RR: I suppose so, I've got 2 who are buying their home. My daughters got a big mortgage. She's got a good job so—you know.

CB: When you look back at your years at Rhydymwyn I get the sense that you enjoyed yourself?

RR: Very much, very much. There was a variety, something different know, and there is one story. Evan Jones's father in law was running the boiler house, and he also was a bit of a barber. And when he came in on shift he'd say "you want a haircut, you want a haircut?". Yes. On what time, let's have a look. 5 to 2. Don't forget 5 to 2. Aye I could do with a haircut. Now I be driving a dumper here and there. Now what I would do, I would park up on a bit of waste ground. I'd have a screwdriver in my pocket and id undo the nuts of the carburetor. Just leave it a little loose. Off to go, have a haircut. One day I came back and the foreman, he was a scouse gentleman, didn't like him very much, he was stood by the dumper waiting. *Hello he says, what's going on, come on what's going on?* You know. I said hang on I said, hang on. *What is it?* I said I've just been up to the fitting shop, got a screwdriver *Why what's up?* I'll show you now, See this carburetor,

it's worked loose. *Oh, bloody hell. That's lucky you found that out* Yes I said, I'll Park up in town and I'll just tighten it up. Ok now. Sorry about *Oh it's OK. You know.* He didn't know I'd been for a haircut did he. (Laughing) Little incidents like that were-- helped you get along I suppose.

CB: it's a good time
Richard I think we have got to the end and that's quite a good place to finish. I think we have done well. That was quite straightforward and natural wasn't it?

RR: Yes.

CB: I told you most people did between three quarters and an hour. Guess what we've done.

