

Transcript of interview with Thomas Bernard, 11 December 2017

00.00

Full name is Thomas Kenneth Bernard; came back to UK in 2015 February; 86 years old; came back for son's burial; suffering with feet so staying to get an operation; feeling pain when walking and does not know if it is arthritis or rheumatism; grew up in the Caribbean; came to UK very young and stayed until he retired to the Caribbean; mother had 3 sons; all have returned to the Caribbean

03.02

Came to the UK at 20 years of age for economical reasons; went to college; took a course in electrical engineering then changed to installation engineering; worked at Ford's motor company; went home and saw if he studied women's wear 'I'd be doing very well so I went to college' [4.10]; studied underwear for men and women; whilst at school he saw the principal cutting a pattern; decided to start a fashion design course; it cost 1,500; paid the full money before he started; it was a private school

06.05

It was at Bayswater; he was the only man in the class; there were students from the Middle East Japan and Far East; finished the 9 month course; took advanced cutting and decided to learn about draping; stopped because the school was expensive; before that he went to the London School of Fashion and spent 2 years there; met a lady from Ghana and she gave him the address of the college in Bayswater; describes journey to Bayswater; retired to St Lucia and got an industrial sewing machine; started with children's wear; employed 2 machinists 'I was doing the cutting things was going alright' [8.46]

08.50

Had an extension at the back of the house in St Lucia; used to do shirts and trousers; tried to see if government would allow him to order own material; not been back since 2015 because has to have operation; describes health in a tropical country and a cold country; 'it takes longer time to comes out because it's a cold country now in a tropical country it's come out quicker' [11.55]; some people from Caribbean who come to UK do not find out about their health so after 3 or 6 months they pass away

12.33

Came to UK in 1956 and had it tough; Caribbean government did not make any arrangement with the British government concerning accommodation; the same day he arrived he paid for accommodation; 'the laws if you were not 21 you could not work in a factory' [13.35]; worked in a firm with a tea coffee shop and a restaurant named J Lyons; worked in the city in Cannon Street for 6 months near St Pauls; then employed in the post office engineering department

15.00

Trying to stick up for his rights but forced to leave; lunch breaks; refused to sign a memo; different treatment of skilled and unskilled workers; threat of being reported to Head Office; decided to leave

18.55

Went to Hatfield to the labour exchange; worked in a factory as assistant store keeper; store keeper left; foreman 'wanted me to teach a white guy the job'[19.48]; tried to teach John the job; Scottish man asked why they did not give him the job; left a month later

21.00

Went to live in Huddersfield in Yorkshire; then went to Manchester; then went to Hatfield; working in the electricity board digging up the road 'they gave you a pickaxe' [22.22]; found a job elsewhere and started going to evening classes; gave it up 'I did not like Yorkshire to me the countryside is too dead' [22.45]; came back to London and wife followed later on; worked for a firm doing tubes for making energy curl heaters for the caterer and electric cooker 'I had to go way up Wembley' [23.20]; the firm moved up the country

24.00

Sent to West Croydon; worked as an operator filling up the tube with magnesium powder; dispute about applying for a job 'from the time I saw the man I knew that he would not employ me from the way he looked at me' [24.38]; went to government training centre for tailoring; after 9 months found a job in Aldgate(?) canvassing jackets 'the money was very small during those days'[26.30]; when Harold Wilson came in 1964 wages increased; joining a union

27.10

If he could canvas 20 jackets a day he would earn £15 or £16; explains how to canvas the jacket; did it for 2 weeks then left; worked in New Cross; trained as an inspector at a glass factory making bottles; explains how to look for defects; stayed about a year then told the foreman he was leaving; foreman 'was a Polish fella or Greek he said I was thinking to recommend you as a foreman you're a very nice guy and you're a nice worker' [29.35]

29.50

Worked in Hatfield and did regular light work; explains working shifts and overtime; went to Ford's motor company in Dagenham; worked on the repair line; explains working on dashboards; foreman watched him work and offered him a job; worked on tailgates

33.45

Stayed at Ford's for 3 years and liked working there; living in New Cross and describes journey to Dagenham; son was suffering with asthma and doctor advised them to leave the country 'the weather used to be very bad' [35.18]; decided to sell the house and return to St Lucia; 3 months later the children wanted to return to UK

36.25

Spent a year and 11 months in St Lucia doing clothing manufacturing; noticed son was unhappy; received a letter from the school principal saying son 'is a very bright guy but we've noticed he is declining so we advise you to take him back' [37.45]; booked the flight and came back

38.24

Went back to Ford's; same foreman remembered and liked him so reinstated him but had to go through a medical; foreman had advised him not to go 'but the child's health come first' [39.22]; son works at BT as an engineer; family is in London; divorced from wife and the children are grown up; worked in many different companies 'it was not easy' [40.35]; describes family relationships and joining brothers in UK; mother borrowed money to pay for the boat 'it took 15 days' [42.15]

42.15

Mother took papers to a lawyer for a mortgage 'it was £56' [42.28]; on arrival in UK experienced worry; things were tough but overcame it; started working at £5.16 for J Lyons; costs of sharing a room; started in Battersea then moved to Paddington; amount of wages; how to make wages pay for accommodation transport and shopping; today the costs of labour causes firms to move out; trades are now outside the city

46.33

Now the money is bigger but accommodation is sky high; how young people survive; used to have men beating black men on the street 'they used to call them teddy boys' [48.00]; how government should have dealt with this

48.35

Pregnancy and no contraceptives; going to clinics for contraceptives; hospitals and married and unmarried couples; not being able to make it in UK in 10 years; effects of staying in a country for longer; people from UK emigrating to Australia get accommodation; 'we went through a lot but we had to face it we overcome it' [52.30]

52.44 audio ends