

Appendix Two: Craft interview transcripts

Sarah Lovett, Firm01PI. November 7th 2011

SN: Sophie Norton and Kim Loader interviewing Sarah Lovett about the company Firm01PI Plasterers and their relationship with public sector as a member of the supply chain. You know me and my interests in craft skills and companies, and how they relate to the, kind of, wider conservation sector.

Kim is interested in small companies, SMEs particularly, and their relationship with the public sector and how they engage with the public sector. Is that right?

KL: Yes.

SN: We just wanted to, kind of, informally ask you about your experiences with the public sector and the work that you do. I have a special interest in training as well, so I wanted to start by asking you how the guys that came to work for the company came to be where they are.

SL: I have 4 men. 3 of them are first and second generation craftsmen, so they've learnt at their grandfathers' knee. One of them was our apprentice, Karl, but Karl had trained in set design and has an art degree, so he's very artistic, he can sculpt so is a really useful member because if we need something copying he can just sculpt it for us. He was struggling to get work, so he then went to one of the local colleges, Redcar, and learnt to be a plasterer. When he came to us he never expected us to do what we do, he thought we were just plasterers. And so we ended up with this fourth man who is an incredibly artistic, clever, articulate, really special person. So he's a very useful member of the team and has learnt so quickly because of obviously being younger and he was used to learning. So he makes up a really good member of the team, even though he hasn't got the wealth of knowledge the others have, he can see different ways, he can apply himself and show different ways of working. So, they've all done their NVQ level 3s because Craven College and helped me to do that, because you'll know about the CSCS cards in heritage. You'll know about the CSCS cards in heritage?

KL: You've mentioned them to me.

SL: It's just such a sensible idea. I don't know how widely people use it, or ask for it.

SN: Not widely enough?

SL: No, I know you (*to SN*) try to promote it. I try to promote it too because there's so many people around that could make a mess of what is so important to conserve and restore. And for people who skills like we've got it's so important for them to be recognised. I really want my men to get the best jobs and be recognised because they deserve it. They're just amazing. There's nothing they can't do. I never have a moments worry about saying yes, we can do that. And I think because I have such faith in them, they come up to the mark as well. It's an interesting... I don't know if you know but we ran this business together, my husband and I, so I was left running on my own, so I haven't got the hands on skill. I'm a project manager, I'm an administrator, I can put things together. But I'm not a plasterer, so I have no, my total faith in them is from what I've seen them do, and talking to them. But it's an interesting side that I might have not a clue how we could do something, but I have total faith we can do it, and as soon as I take one of them to site and

say 'right we've got this amazing job to do, we need to have a look at it together' but they don't worry. With Thomas they worried a little bit because he would worry a little bit, and they looked to him to make all the decisions, whereas I look to them so between them, all this knowledge is, I think, used far more constructively. When there's a male leader there who wants it done his way or feels that he needs to lead from the front, they don't say so much, but they call their knowledge with me. They have to. So I think it brings the best of them.

KL: That's interesting, yeah.

SL: It's a strange company!

SN: So are they quite involved in decision making on site?

SL: Yes., absolutely.

SN: And when your pricing things?

SL: They are involved in everything and anything. Not always, because something might be straightforward. But generally especially Joseph Clayborn. Joseph and I work absolutely totally side by side on work. It is an unusual situation and I'm very lucky with the men that I've got that it works that way. But it does work.

SN: It's quite a motivational setup for both of you, isn't it?

SL: Yes.

SN: Later on can we go and have a look at the workshops?

SL: Yes, they're cleaning up in readiness for you.

SN: Good we've got cameras!

SL: Joseph said 'you didn't say they were coming today'. But you should be tidy anyway!

Laughing

SL: So, yes I have a fantastic team of men but it is an unusual business setup. It's not the norm. I mean I probably am the only woman in the country who runs.....

SN: ...a fibrous plastering business. I mean that's interesting....something we haven't really thought about it is. The involvement of different genders and stuff.

KL: Yes

SL: Yes, very different. But it is a bonus in some aspects I'm sure. Because nobody will ever forget when I go to site. They might have 10 men, but the one woman who turns up, they're not going to forget you are they. So I play that card as much as I can! It does help. But I'm also confident, because I have such faith in them that that gives the customer faith as well. But we are an unusual company.

SN: So how old was Karl hen he came to you?

SL: I think he would have been about 23 24.

SN: That's quite old for an apprentice isn't it? That would make him outside the apprenticeship system if he went to do a traditional apprenticeship. So you wouldn't have been....well I don't even know if you're a member of ConstructionSkills...a levy payer or anything?

SL: Yes.

SN: You are.

SL: Yes, but the only time it's come into force, or use, I'm not very impressed with it, is with the NVQs we got some money back for. A little bit.

SN: Not a huge amount.

SL: No. But, the college made it so easy for us because they truly believed that men of, my oldest will be 54, so the three men that didn't have qualifications were definitely over 40, they're not used to studying.

KL/SN: No, absolutely.

SL: It's scary to be told 'right you're going to do your NVQ3 because I want you to have this card. And here's this information and you've got to this, you've got to do that.' Absolutely terrifying, especially for Jim who's the eldest one. And Craven College just made it so easy and straightforward for them, because they knew they deserved it. They knew that they shouldn't have to do what they were having to do. Because they have it all. But...

KL: Just formalising.

SL: Yes. There has to be some sort of levelling point. But they made it very simple. So that was great, they all got their cards, which is fantastic.

KL: Craven College. Whereabouts is that?

SL: Skipton.

KL: It is Skipton, right. So how did they actually do the course? What was the method of learning?

SL: They came and visited the workshop and explained what they needed to do. They visited them on site at particular jobs and observed them. They...visited them several times...

SN: They help them build a portfolio don't they...it's assessment by portfolio.

SL: That's right. They have to actually answer questions. And then they have to talk about a job they've done and annotate pictures to make...

KL: So they come to you rather than you having to attend a college.

SL: Yes, so it doesn't really affect work.

KL: Right, yes of course.

SL: When one of the boys was panicking about writing up, they provided a secretary to write it up.

SN: Really?

KL: Goodness!

SL: Yes, she came and helped. I helped. We did it all together. But they absolutely bent over backwards to help. But not in, it's not a cheating way, it was necessary and the right way to...you know you need to make these people have what they deserve really.

SN: There was a rule with those qualifications that you had to have been working on heritage work for 5 years to do the on site assessment, so if you were before that then you may have had to have gone to college but if you do have the relevant experience...I think that's the rule...that was the rule anyway, but like all these things they get diluted a little bit, don't they? But that was the original idea.

SL: Well we've been doing it for so long.

SN: So when you are working, and talking about practices and things like that, with somebody like Karl does that mean that you're able to do freehand modelling?

SL: Yes

SN: Because I read a lot about pre-18th century work and how it was much more freehand.

SL: Yes, similar to, sort of, this (*points to wall*).

SN: In Tudor buildings you see it quite a lot on ceilings don't you.

SL: Yes, yes that's right. Absolutely he can do that. I mean he would draw it up on a ceiling, I mean that's how it works when he makes something. Because you have to do free hand and then cast it to then have a rubber mould. But he just copies from...he's just amazing. He really is though, his skill is immense. I'll show you some stuff that he's done. Very, very good. Thomas did these though (*points to wall again*). The bat was found desiccated in a wall and the squirrels, a friend that was moving to France, not that I particularly liked it, but I do now because it's part of the family! I couldn't bear for it to be thrown out. So, we had the squirrel. It probably looks horrendous, but we're so used to it..

SN: No it doesn't..

SL: Are you cringing..?

KL: No, I'm used to wildlife. Maybe not usually stuffed on walls...

SN: Taxidermy was really popular a couple of years ago, wasn't it. It was on clothes and things like that.

SL: Really?

SN: Yeah, it was really fashionable.

SL: Really, I know it used to be fashionable.

SN: I think a couple of years ago there was a bit of a boom in it.

SL: Yuh?

SN: Anyway..

KL: Can I just ask, did Karl just get in touch with you or were you actively looking for someone?

SL: No, we definitely weren't. He got in touch with us and came to see us and Thomas gave him a lump of clay and a picture, and said go away and do that and then come back. And of course he just did an amazing job and we could see huge potential and we both liked him, so we took him on. And he's just learnt so fast.

KL: So you've sort of really adapted to accommodate...and moved on to accommodate what he can bring rather than having identified it as...

SL: To have an in-house sculptor is phenomenal, because it really does mean...because I don't know what we'd do if..sometimes it's only tiny, little things that need doing, or little repairs that...I mean they can all do repairs, but not the

sculpting work. I mean, they do look, one of the lads out there totally looks up to Karl. Jim's the oldest, Karl's the youngest. Jim has a wealth of experience. Karl's not the new boy any more but, Jim totally....'that's Karl's job, ask Karl, Karl'll know'. It's great, it's good for Karl because it's helped him come up to the same level. And I don't think Karl would see, he will know that the others have a lot of skill but he knows he's...they all are on a level.

SN: What about the other three? Did they all come to you...did they all work independently?

SL: They were all self employed.

SN: Oh, are they?

SL: Eldon....Jim came to us first. We kept using Jim, he was from Middlesbrough, for odd jobs. And then he started, before you had to employ, he started working, he was still self-employed, and we just paid him every week and he worked for us. Then rules and regulations changed and we had to employ him, which he didn't want to do, but I think he was happy to do it in the end. He wasn't getting regular work, we were getting the best work, we were beating him on price I suppose. So he ended up coming to us, so that was the first one. Then Eldon Holmes from TE Ashworth. They were a very notable company that was run by...started by Eldon's grandfather. Hi father retired and Eldon didn't want to take over the company. He doesn't like being upfront.

SN: Oh really.

SL: Really. Although he's absolutely fine, he's great with customers. But he doesn't want that type of responsibility; he's not comfortable with it. So he came to us. And then Karl came to us. And Thomas obviously made up the fourth, so when Thomas died I needed another man to make up two teams of two, and Joseph Clayborn, who his father, brother and he worked together and his father died. And then Joseph himself, who is totally capable of running his own business...

KL: No, no.

SL: Anyway, Joseph ended up coming to us and wanted not to have the stress of running his own company anymore. Wanted the quality of life with his family, after having a shock. But he is absolutely right hand man. He is phenomenal, because he prices the same as me. We can price something and be within £50 of each other. On thousands of pounds, you know.

KL: Oh, that's interesting.

SL: He has the right work ethic because in his head he's still self-employed. So he doesn't rush off as soon as the bell goes. He's just amazing, he can go out and price work for me. He knows exactly what goes on. And then his wife works in the office for me on a Friday so she knows absolutely everything. So it's totally transparent, the company. When you've run your own company you understand that when you need two new vans, when you need all the insurance, you know why you get paid this and the company charges that. So it's not a problem. They all know that I have overheads and my own wage needed out of it. So it works to be transparent, which must be hugely unusual.

SN: Well I know a couple of people that work in hair dressers and they're always getting angry about, the amount of, you know, what they take, what they feel like they take. And then what they get paid, but they don't take into account all the overheads and things like that.

SL: No, and insurance, health and safety, ahh it's phenomenally expensive. And insurance on, you know running a business out there. Yes, and fortunately they do understand. Karl doesn't. It's very obvious Karl doesn't. There was a job recently and it only needed...he...it was fine for him to go and set up with Jim, but he should've come back to the workshop, and he didn't. He'll have fuffed around and then helped him clear up and come back. And he doesn't understand that who pays your wage for that faffing around time...I'm still paying. What are you bringing in? He just sees it, it's just work. Just a bit of...anyway. Whereas the others truly understand what business is.

SN: So you know the location and site and things like that, does that make it more expensive to run that if it was on an industrial estate?

SL: No, it depends how much I charge my buildings out at. I charge the company to use my barn as part of my income. No, it's cheaper and of course it's very easy for me to keep a handle on everything and look after children. You know, I can get up and feed Georgia before she goes to school, see Sam off and see to my horses and my dogs. And open up the barn and get, you know, ready for them without having to think, 'right, and I have to be out of the house by half past seven because I've got to get to the workshop'. So, and also it's more secure.

SN: Yes, I can imagine that.

SL: I'm thinking of moving my office out of, you came past my office, as you came in the front door. I'm thinking of building an internal room into the barn with a window out onto the field. So that I can have my house back and walk to work. I just think it would be healthier.

KL: Have a kind of a separation.

SL: And actually sort of cut it off at the weekend, whereas I don't.

SN: It's very much a part of house downstairs as well isn't it? Lots of people have offices upstairs, don't they? When it's downstairs, directly next to the front door...

SL: Well it's good, because of course I see any deliveries coming and...it's very convenient...

KL: Yes, yes...

SL: But I could, I could make it more apparent where the business was...I could put a sign... the neighbours next door won't let us have a sign, but...

KL: Oh right. Because I must admit, I went and asked. I knew it was Rose Cottage Farm and there was a van just arriving at the gate...

SL: Oh right, there is a sign hanging over the fence, but there's a tree by it now and the oak is so beautiful in colour that it sort of merges into it a bit! So you don't see it. Maybe instead of it being in gold, maybe I ought to paint it in black, the writing. It's carved in says Rose Cottage Farm, I'll show you when I go out. But I need to make it more apparent.

SN: I missed it when I first came.

SL: Everybody misses it. Everybody does!

KL: You must have a work access...?

SL: Yes, you've parked between my front door and the work access.

KL: Because I started going up one and it said Poppy Cottage

SL: Yes, that one.

KL: Oh right, it is that. That put me off going up there.

SL: Was the gate closed?

KL: No I think it was open.

SL: You just come straight up. But they won't let us have a sign there, even though it's the access to our property they've cause us a lot of trouble over the years. They're the sort of people who need to live with conflict. And I've only once come across that, but it's not nice. They've been better since Thomas died, but I just keep it really civil. They really caused trouble for us.

KL: And is it really just deliveries? Presumably, I mean do you get clients or potential clients coming here? Or do you go out to them?

SL: I go out to them. Sometimes I invite people, but it's rare. I mean we have the vans arriving. Not every day. Our two vans or the boys arriving. But it's early morning; by 8oclock everybody's here. And then they go out again. Or they don't, whichever.

KL: But in terms of having a sign, it's not perhaps a major problem if you haven't got people coming to you...

SL: No I don't encourage people just to drop in; they must make an appointment. But, it helps so that people know where I am. I could just move the sign really I think. And put it by the gate.

SN: Was it easy to get planning permission?

SL: Very. We didn't have any initially and then somebody doxed us in, so they came around and we wanted a window in the workshop. And the only thing that they said is 'well, you must put a window in'. And we went 'yes! Great'. But, they wanted to know how noisy it would be and I said 'picture a washing up bowl of water and water in and it going swish, swish, swish. That's as noisy as it gets because that's how you mix your plaster'. So, and then the drying room is on overnight on cheap rate electric, so that's quiet. And it's right out there; you can't hear anything. But then unfortunately, as the planning people left, they noticed that the neighbours had built an area for parking in their field, and it's agricultural land and you're not allowed, so they actually got told that they couldn't do that. Some things just blow up in your face, don't they! So we got what we wanted, which was fine. Yes, it works well.

SN: Talking about materials and things like that, where do you get your materials from?

SL: We were using a company in Middlesbrough who are dental suppliers for casting plaster, but recently we realised that they get their...we needed something...and we got it from Leeds...and the price difference was about £1 per bag of plaster. Well, on a 6lb bag of plaster, £1 is a lot. So, we have actually now started getting it from Leeds, which is where I suppliers were buying it from, so obviously that was their mark up. Which is sad actually because the company in Middlesbrough looked after us so well, and you become so friendly with the same chaps that deliver, I mean they come in for bacon sandwiches and coffee. Maybe that's just because I'm such a softy. Now we get a big pallet delivered from Leeds because price is everything now. Everything is so expensive.

KL: How did you come to make the switch then?

SL: We needed a specialist product and Joseph said we'd get it from Leeds. If we're going to get that, maybe we'd better just have a pallet of...you know make it worthwhile. And then we realised the price was so different. So, we now get it from there. But I...this is the not being a really hard business woman...I feel guilty about not giving my business to the company in Middlesbrough, who are the n going to...you know...it's all income isn't it. But, business is business. And I need, you know, we need, to tighten up as well, because everything's going up.

What else do we get? Oh lime! We've changed...we were getting lime from...Derbyshire

SN: Buxton?

SL: No. Where was it coming from...?

SN: Lincolnshire? Was it Singleton Birch?

SL: No, that's terrible. I think they've hit a bad strata. They've got something in it...it's really bad at the moment.

SN: It fails a lot, doesn't it?

SL: Yes. An awful lot. And last winter...both Alan Clark and I, we were discussing it and he said 'did you use Singleton Birch' and I said 'yeah' and he said 'come and look at this', and I said 'yes, that's exactly what's happened to mine, just really bad'. So no, we don't use that at all'.

SN: And they're the only lime manufacturers in the country, aren't they?

SL: No!

SN: The only hydraulic lime manufacturers in the country...?

SL: Are they?

SN: I think so yes.

SL: We've been getting some, the NHL, from David Cartwright lately.

SN: Right, ok.

SL: But it's French. Not St. Astier, but it's French. I thought it wasn't, but then we got some before he'd re-bagged it, or whatever. And it's French. But the lime putty we've been getting from Cornwall. The Cornish...because we were using...I can't remember their name...a localish...quite a local place...and I think it'd been taken over by Polish but it wasn't being...it was coming very lumpy and not sieved properly. Just not good. And you can't risk, with lime, it's just got to be right. You can't risk your products failing. Because to claim back would just be a nightmare...Phone rings.

SL: So yes, NHL from Wormersley's lately but I can't remember....

SN: Well we ask up there where the lime putty came from.

SL: Yeah they'll remember. I could tell you, I just can't...

SN: Do you store much of it or do you just tend to use it?

SL: Try to store quite a bit actually, because it just gets better.

SN: Yeah, that's what I've heard.

SL: We have a board where we've done some work and it says frozen plaster across it because we had a bucket that had been frozen and we wanted to know if it was going to be ok. And it was absolutely fine, of course.

SN: Really, sometimes when things freeze they change don't they..?

SL: Yeah, but I can't think why lime... And I was right, it was fine. I said 'use it'. And it was, it was good, it was fine. So, yes, we've gone to this Cornish company. I was going to use local at Rillington, Chalk Hill, but we'd had a bit of...it wasn't 100% from him. However, he's desperate for us to try some more so he was going to send me some samples. It's nice to be able to use local, especially if you're working in the local area you want to be using the local products. Especially in something like lime I think, because it's going to, I feel it just will blend in better and work better. It just seems the right thing to do in that environment.

SN: Well it's interesting isn't it, because in conservation when people specify stone they go to great lengths to try and get a matching stone, but with lime they're much more...

SL: I don't think they think that way...

SN: I don't know...lots of people have researched different types of kiln and there's lots of kilns on building sites, so it looks like people were just using whatever was completely local.

SL: Yes. There are so many limekilns around here...across the moors. Because, of course, they wouldn't be able to bring stuff in, they would just do it in situ.

SN: Absolutely they would. I can imagine that really a lot in, like, rendering and washing and building, but not so much in the decorative, fibrous work. Is that more specialised? So, it would be interesting to find out where that came from...it must've been some sort of finer type of lime, it's so clear, so white. Normally it's quite mucky isn't it?

SL: But is it really that white, or is it just what was mixed with it?

SN: Or maybe they've washed it as well I suppose. The ceiling that I love most is in Speke Hall. It's a Tudor building on the River Mersey...

SL: I've heard of it...maybe I've got it in one of my books that I've seen.

SN: Well it's beautiful

SL: Probably in my Miller's book.

SN: It might be in there...it's really natural because the Jacobean did a lot of...you know, it was all taken from foliage and stuff like that, all the decoration. There's big like buds and other things from nature hanging off the ceiling. It's amazing. But it's not completely white, you're right, not in the same way an Adam building is white. It's, like kind of greyer, so maybe it's washed.

SL: Yes. There are some amazing...

SN: Well, we could move on from talking about the practices and things now...couldn't we?

KL: If you've, because that was the bit that you particularly were interested in, so if you're...

SN: I think so yeah, and when we go to the back and take some photographs and things like that we'll get some more. So, we should move on to...

KL: Well, I was just going to ask how many...I mean do you have a good choice of suppliers? Do you find it quite difficult to find what you want? Or do you have to go great distances?

SL: No, no, in general. It's more things like sand that changes. You know, the local supplier will suddenly use a different type and that will affect the finish of what we do, and it can be very different. So, what we tend to do is use

David Cartwright, who's an eco, natural building supplying company, who gets the same type in and it has names, so we know that we can get Nosterfield or Leighton Buzzard for whatever finish we want and it's right every time. So we tend to get that for our topcoats, so we know it's going to be what...but it's a lot more expensive, and it's sort of in bags like this (*demonstrates small bag size with hands*), whereas sand you want to be getting a ton, but we will get a ton of ordinary local. So very often, if we're working at Tadcaster, for instance, we'll use the local builders' suppliers and just ask them to drop a ton off for us. Here...if it's for here we'll just use our local suppliers and ask them to drop a ton off. Or I can go to the quarry myself and just take the trailer.

KL: Oh right, yeah.

SL: But the other, the lime, yes I have to keep an eye on the price, but also the quality.

KL: Mmmm. And is there some, any kind of, I don't know, network or trade association, or anything like that that helps you? Or is it really just down to you, your contacts or...

SL: I don't know, it's just...I've never thought whether there is or not.

KL: It's quite hard to...you know if you need a new one...how would you start to find a new supplier?

SL: Just google.

KL: Oh right...so ok, yeah.

SL: Or, but it's word of mouth. You chat. There are a lot of people in the same line of business. And actually having Joseph, well all the lads, they're all aware of...

KL: So they'll hear...

SL: And they'll talk on site with you know...it's just chat isn't it? 'Do you get your such and such', you know, 'where do you get this?'. We're very basic in our supplies, you know, we don't need anything...we don't have plasticisers or all the little bits and bobs that...we don't get plasterboard. It is just basic lime.

SN: Are you a member of the Building Limes Forum?

SL: I'm not, no.

SN: They do a...I think Alan is. And (*to KL*) Alan's a kind of practitioner in Malton

KL: Right

SL: Alan's a guru though!

SN: A member of everything...

SL: He is...he's very, very clever.

SN: He's so passionate about lime...

SL: He is passionate, but he's also incredibly cerebral isn't he? A very clever man.

SN: Yeah he is. He's an interesting guy actually. But yeah, the Building Limes Forum, I think they're kind of midlands based. They have a website and produce articles, and they do like a lime conference every year and stuff like that. This one was in Birmingham.

SL: Because I was thinking of joining the Scottish Lime...

SN: The Charlestown Workshops? They do lots of training as well.

SL: Yeah, and Thomas did go once. He and Henry Morris who's, (to SN) you know Henry, Henry's my neighbour on the hill. And I remember them not being very impressed with it all. In fact thinking it was a real waste of time. So I haven't, sort of, gone that route. However, I have been in touch with the Plaisterers Guild in London to see whether it would be relevant for me to join that. Guild of Plaisterers? Yeah. I got to that through...we won an award through the York Guild of Builders, who are a bit Masonic in some ways I think...We went to the award ceremony, we got an award for Pickering Station, we did a beautiful external cornice in lime, which is fantastic, really looks good. It's very simplistic but it's all done by eye, which is as it would have been done. And, so we got an award for that and while I was there, I speaking to, well I was just thinking how good it was to have a Guild of...I thought it was something we ought to join, but I think it's more for the individual as opposed to the company. I don't really have time to go and do all their little talks and get-togethers.

SN: And it's in London.

SL: No, this one's in York.

SN: What? The Guild of Plaisterers?

SL: No, the Guild of Building. So, I think it's really good to be part of these things and support them, as much as they support you, and also I want as much recognition for my men as I can. Just because I feel passionate about what they do. I think they're just wonderful. We also won another award this year via Roger Tempest at Broughton Hall at Skipton. We helped restore a castle in Inverness and that whole restoration got historic restoration of the year award via Sotheby's I think it was. So we were part of that.

KL: That was Inverness?

SL: Mmmm

KL: Oh right...

SL: Last Christmas we were doing a job up in the Shetland Islands and I didn't even visit it. I mean it was going to be... it would push the price up by so much, by several thousand, so I did it all...pictures.

KL: Because that was one of our questions; what the kind of range, catchment, how far you...

SL: Anywhere, absolutely anywhere.

KL: So with that one then, you did everything here, did you? Or did you actually send your men up there?

SL: What they did was they...Well I sent two of the blokes up with the van so they had a days drive up to Aberdeen and get onto the ferry, then a night time crossing, arrive in the morning, got onto site, pulled the ceiling down, took all the templates they needed, because it was a decorative ceiling, took all the templates, photograph so that they knew how it was going to go back, pulled the ceiling down, lathed and put the first coat of plaster on and then came home. So that was about a weeks work. Then, worked in the workshop for a week, making all the plaster mouldings up, then returned to site and floated the ceiling, then they put on the, all the enrichments everywhere and did the corning. And by that stage they could then skim.

KL: Uh huh.

SL: So, and then come home. So they had two weeks up there and a week in the workshop.

KL: And that was on the basis of...you'd put in a tender...

SL: ...price...

KL: Without having actually visited it.

SL: Well yes, we were the only person he asked to price for it. He was just delighted he would go and do it.

KL: So that was just through word of mouth, a recommendation...

SL: I think he'd just googled us.

KW: Oh right...

SL: And we possibly were one of the nearest people. Haha!

KW: Yes...

SN: Possibly...

SL: Yeah we quite a lot on the website now. I've really upgraded the website.

KL: I had a look at it after...you know. Yes it was wonderful, really interesting. Quality and everything.

SL: Oh thank you. Well, that's thanks to my webman. The colour and...He said to me after Tom...because I said to him 'I really need to do this now' because Thomas had been procrastinating. And he put together the colour scheme. Well, we must've talked about it. I feel he did everything, but obviously he talked and listened to what I wanted. And he was very helpful to me. He said 'no, this is your company. Take ownership. Stop running it for Thomas'. And it was really good advice because, you know, it has to be. But yet I felt I was just doing it for Thomas. What good is that? He's not coming back, so... So, it was a really good move, and he made it a much, the website, he made it I think quite feminine...

SN: Who's that? Did you have a website designer?

SL: Ed Richardson. He's fabulous. He's really, really good. He's from Harrogate. Actually he's living in Cundal at the moment I think. But he was from Harrogate. Or Easingwold. I can't remember. I would recommend him to anybody though, because he obviously really listened and...

SN: It has changed a lot, I think, since I've been looking at it. Because it used to be green, didn't it?

SL: I can't remember, but it was only a page. I might've been green.

SN: I think it was green.

KL: Now it's, much more, not really pinks but sort of beige and cream.

SL: It's duck egg blue with traffic grey, it's called.

SN: A greyey pink colour

KL: Yes, yes...

SN: But it does look like...it says quality

SL: Its those colours

KL: Yes, yes, it does...

SN: ...it depicts quality

SL: It's got the F, that's a little part of the F..

KL: Yes, I remember the F

SL: And that's on the side of the can as well...but it's got that as a background

KL: Did he do that, or did you already have that?

SL: No, no, he did that...because also, I said 'I don't want it to be Firm01PI Plasterers', even though I still say it, because people think we're plasterers, and it gives a picture of duck down, whatever, I don't know much about that stuff...board and skim. And we're not, so that's why he devised the 'F' of Firm01PI, and it does say 'plasterers and cornice specialists'.

KL: Yes, I've got you down as Firm01PI

SL: Yes, because...

SN: I call you Firm01PI

SL: But, you can't change the name of a company, and hope to hold on to everybody, so I thought by changing it slightly, so that what people saw was not plasterers...because plasterers now get lost there...

KL: So you can focus on...

SL: Yes, Firm01PI.

SN: So why did you choose the name Firm01PI?

SL: Because Thomas was local. I mean he was 17 when he set it up. And he was just a wall plasterer, just board and skim, but when he met me, we were from very different backgrounds and he felt very inspired and wanted to move up. That sounds quite...it doesn't sound very nice, but we were...I was very middle class, he was very working class, and he wanted to step up. You can't step down...and so you've got to find a level plain somewhere, and we were very much in love, and it worked incredibly well, but he pulled up to step up to the mark sort of thing, and he saw different...ways of life differently. I suppose I brought him out of his comfort zone and took him somewhere else. But he was so flexible and so articulate and intelligent, he had vast amounts of potential and he just lived up to it and went and worked with...who was the? ...well he worked with Eldon's dad a bit, Eldon Holmes, but he would work with people for nothing to learn more. And he went to college. And he read. And he just used a friend, at the time we lived in, we didn't have this (*the house*), we didn't have enough room, so he used a friend's log shed, pig shed I think it was actually, to start making cornice and playing around and finding out about it. So he learnt a vast amount and then we started, we changed, we set up a company alongside the plastering to do the mouldings, and then it took over totally, which is what he wanted. So we started it together and ran it together. It was only after he died that I realised how much I knew about it. I didn't realise that I was quite as knowledgeable as I was. And then (*to SN*), do you know Barry Henderson up in Scotland?

SN: I know of him more than...

SL: Then he went to work with Barry, to find out about lime and would work with Barry for several weeks for nothing just staying with him...

KL: To learn...

SL: Yep, but being Thomas he learnt a vast amount. And he and Barry got on so well that he just questioned everything and learnt a lot about that. And then we started doing the lime work, which, it doesn't sound like lime work and corncicing goes alongside, but you know, they very much are just traditional, natural ways of working.

KL: So, when you say you work anywhere, is it still mainly in...

SL: North Yorkshire

KL: North Yorkshire. Is that changing at all? Are you sort of spreading kind of further afield? Or is pretty much the same?

SL: Work has changed...we do larger jobs now. Rather than just residential. Thomas, I think, because the buck stopped with him and his skill and his knowledge, he would keep it a little bit close to home, and smaller. So, to go and do a residential house and cornice it was very straightforward, manufacture it here, take it to site, fit it. Whereas, like I was saying before, my enthusiasm and faith in what my lads can do, I will just take on anything. When he died, I went under things and found tenders for all sorts of amazing jobs...just hadn't even looked at them. Pushed them away thinking...it would be a bit if 'oh no'. He was slightly dyslexic and actually despite that, that might have just been a social thing from his upbringing, he had a tough upbringing, he would just look at something and I think he would just shut down rather than read it. He'd try to read it, but it would just be 'huuuuh'. On sensible days he would say 'read this to me' and I would read it, and he would understand it. But he didn't ask enough for my help. He felt it was his responsibility to do everything with regard to the business. I did all the administration. Everything to do with reading, writing, bills, everything else, wages. So, he didn't reach where he should've done. He did do one or two fantastic jobs but I know it was with trepidation and with...gut wrenching for him. But he was totally...what was your question...?

KL: I was just...

SN: About how far you travel

KL: Yes that's right, North Yorkshire...

SL: Yes. I think we travel further now. Thomas did one job up in the north of Scotland, I think that was courtesy of Barry Henderson that we went up to do that one...

SN: Barry's actually an alumni of the Conservation Studies course, at the University.

KL: Oh right

SL: So yes we have done now Inverness, the Shetland Islands, across to Cumbria. Where else have they stayed? We've been asked to do work down in London. I'm loathed to...I did pass some of the London work on because...this particular job was in Brixton just before all that trouble kicked off, I just thought, I don't want to have to send the lads down there quite honestly. Into London. And put them up somewhere and... Because at the end of the day it's not just work, it's quality of life, it's their quality of life as well. And they all have children, so we do go and do jobs away from here. But I do try to limit it.

KL: And do they ever comment on that?

SL: Yes. 'Me please!' They tend to get...they get time and a half on, because they won't go and do just a normal 8 hour day. If they're away, they do 12 hour days. There's no point going up to sit around and make the job last longer.

So they do it quicker, and they get paid more. So, one of the lads, also if it's to Scotland or anywhere, he loves fishing, so he always wants to go. The young lad, Karl, he tends to work with Jim, the fisherman, so they tend to go together. And...there's only Eldon I wouldn't send away...his wife isn't as...she wouldn't cope as well without him. So, I've got a choice of three. Or I could send all three. Three's good actually because you can fit three in the van. It makes everything you know, you do it quickly.

KL: But would that cause a problem with just having one left here?

SL: No because we can leave one in the workshop. It can actually work very well. Especially if it's a massive job and they can send a template back. Eldon can be making it up and then they return, stock p and off they go. No, it does work quite well.

SN: Do you ever...would you travel internationally?

SL: Yes, yeah. We haven't. Eldon has, with his Dad.

SN: Has he?

SL: Yes, Belgium I think it was. We haven't, but yes we would. Barry was asking us about doing something recently. Actually it's not recently, it's just before Thomas died. And we were thinking of doing it out in the Caribbean...because they had no knowledge of what we did, so they would need to be trained. Yeah, yeah it wouldn't be a problem.

KL: And most of your work...do you...is it people that come to you asking for quotes, rather than you going out looking?

SL: Yes, yeah. Although I do stop on the roadside and nip in and talk and...if I see something that I think might be...you know...like a big house that's having some building work done. I always nip in and leave something and say 'this is who we are'. But no, people come to us, I don't know really how you'd go out and get the work if... It's not that kind of...I tried to cultivate relationships with National Trust, English Heritage, people like that. We don't get much...I did do head office English Heritage but we don't get a lot of their work. It tends to go to our competitors Cornice Co, Aiden. I spoke to him for the first time recently...he asked us if we could...well he rang up and said 'this work that you've handed across to us in London'...I suggested them. He said 'you know, we could work together if you need some support, or we do...' And then he rang just the other week and said 'can you help with Nostell Priory?'

SN: Yeah they are doing...

SL: Yes. And we'd actually done some work at Nostell and then this ornate work...I just...she had wanted us to do it. But of course it's not up to the people that are there, that actually interact with the people that are working, it's just an office thing. So, we didn't get that one. That's ok. It's nearer to Ronnie anyway.

KL: So, Ornate Interiors. That's your main competitor? Where are they based?

SL: Leeds.

KL: So you haven't actually done any work together yet. But you pass on that one.

SL: Yes.

KL: So are you reluctant to do that, or?

SL: Yes, a little bit. I'd rather just stick within our...what we can capably do. I don't want to take on loads more men – Ronnie has a lot of men working for him – it's...you have to get just about every job you price for. Therefore you have to buy your work sometimes. And that's, I don't see the point. I want quality of life. I want a life as well as working. And I love my work, so I'm happy, but it mustn't be everything. And I want my lads to feel comfortable, that they have the time and they can do the job right. Because it's not just putting up the mouldings it's actually protecting, in a lovely house. Fairfax House for instance, that we just recently, did a test on the ceiling, a lot of...you have to price in for possibly a couple of days protecting; boarding in fire places, all sorts of things. Because if anything comes down and you damage something it'd be terrible! So that's part of knowing how to treat a heritage site, you know, or be a conservationist and they're all aware of that. And they think actually beyond my...sometimes I don't...they say 'oh, you didn't allow enough time for protecting that' you know doorways and... so it's something to think about. So there's time to set up, and there's time to take down. Well sometimes, this is why I think this CSCS card is a good idea. So there are levels of people who know how to treat a site, you know, you can get a better price on it, but they...if they haven't priced to protect your furniture or your carpets or...the property we go into are just phenomenal, you know, and...thousands and thousands of pounds worth of wonderful stuff to you know, cover and, so that's an important part of it.

SN: With the National Trust, do you have to tender for that?

SL: Not as much, and not with...both Stuart McPherson at Scott's Gap and David Parker at York both just ask me what it would cost now. But maybe they've got used to my prices or they know that...

SN: Well I don't know if there's a legal requirement for the National Trust to tender because it's a charity...I mean it's a massive charity, but it's independent isn't it? So I don't know if they come under European...

KL: I'm not sure actually...

SL: No I'm not sure.

SN: If it was an HLF project, then, you know if they had funding from the HLF, then they would have to. But I think if it's just their own money from their own revenue then...I doubt, I don't know, we'd (to KL) have to look it up.

KL: Yeah...

SN: But with English Heritage's you'd always have to tender. And, I mean does the tender process...it gets filtered through doesn't it...so if the main contractor wants to tender a specialist part of the work...

SL: That's when it gets a bit...

SN: That's the sort of thing that puts you off...?

SL: Mmmm...

SN: Right ok.

KL: So do you do that quite a lot? Would you just go in and contract with the...

SL: National Trust.

KL: Well whoever was the main...

SL: The main body as opposed to a building contractor?

KL: Yes.

SL: That's how I would prefer to work because as soon as there's another party...for instance it happened...we were doing Doubleday Hall...

SN: The [client], yeah...

SL: And the company went bust...

KL: The prime contractor

SL: Now we could have done the work cheaper directly with the [client] and we have all the Health and Safety in place. We have everything. But they are obliged, maybe, to go through a building contractor. I don't know.

SN: It's probably easier for the [client], isn't it, to contract the whole lot, than to break things down into smaller contracts.

SL: And yet again, when Joseph and I went to site...I've forgotten her name but the girl who's in charge of all the maintenance and repairs and things there...

SN: Farah Mason, is that her name?

SL: No...

SN: No, I don't know then.

SL: She wanted us to do the job. You get an appreciation of what people do, you like them, but of course it wasn't up to her, but she said she would push it, and anyway they started the job and they went bust. It was Urwins. And then they became Unite Construction...which is appalling, how these companies can just re-set up. Because they came for a site meeting here, because I said I don't have time to come down to...because they'd messed us about. They came here, three of them, all in separate cars, all big chunky 4 wheel drives, all with private plates, all with their suits on, and...I thought this is all wrong. They had all their men work up until the last day of the month, then they didn't pay their wages, the company went bust and that was it, no money left, and they got... and they know what they're doing. And then they go and set up a new company. Anyway, we didn't lose out as it happens, but it so could've been dreadful.

SN: It's actually interesting...there's a series called English Heritage. Have you heard of it?

SL: No.

SN: I was telling Kim about it last week, but it's about four projects that English Heritage have worked...have err funded. And one of them was at Kennilworth Castle by...near Birmingham and the head of English Heritage's wife, who also works there, wanted to recreate the Elizabethan garden that was described in a letter. And they contacted it out and the main contractor when bust within a week so they then re-contracted it.....it was really, really, like, unfortunate circumstances...

SL: You see they should be obliged...you can do a risk...you can go onto a website and you can...it's so easy. You can just go and see what their...

SN: Financial position is...?

SL: Yes!

SN: Well I thought you were supposed to do that.

SL: Well I certainly would.

SN: After that they then contracted in a different company called Rok, R-O-K, and I'd never heard of them, I didn't know if they had conservation specialists or anything...

SL: They went bust as well...

SN: I think they've gone bust since. I think this was in 2006 or something. But they contracted McCurdy's to build the timber trellis...McCurdy's are a really famous building conservation timber company...they built the globe...the globe theatre. So they were contracted to do that. And then they kind of realised that because this building didn't have a roof, the trellis, it wasn't...

SL: Stable?

SN: Health and safety efficient for our modern times. And they were just doing it off a letter anyway, so they didn't even really know what it was built of in the first place. So they went to site and they met with Rok and English Heritage and they decided together to reinforce it with steel, stainless steel. And the stainless steel came it at something like £70k and because McCurdy's hadn't got it on paper, no-one would pay McCurdy's. And McCurdy's are like a 12 person...you should really watch it, it's a brilliant episode...it's really riveting. I showed it to a load of 19 year olds last week and really enjoyed it. But erm...yeah...they were the smallest company. They're kind of like you (*to SL*) in that they like to nurture people, you know, they take...they've had a lot of people that are apprentices in their 30's and stuff like that, and just want to kind of start again in life and things. And they work out of a historic building like you (*to SL*), so they're conserving that... And they just...you know...they really became the big loser. And noone would help them at all.

SL: That's appalling.

SN: It really is appalling. And I think English Heritage just completely backed off because the whole...

SL: They should've taken it all down and taken it away

'Phone Rings

SN: I suppose they could've done, but they'd never work for English Heritage again would they?

SN: (*to KL*) And I hadn't really thought about that relationship between the main contractor and the sub-contractor before now.

SL: (*About phone call*) A job we're doing up in the...up at Castleton, up on the moors.

KL: Oh yes, I know.

SL: They're right down in a valley...it's the most...little road down. Dreading going up in winter...

KL: Oh snow, yes...So York, the Doubleday Hall then, were you doing a very kind of specific, specialist part of the contract? On your own as it were, there was nobody else doing...

SL: There wasn't actually anything else to do. They'd got this building contractor in to manage it. We were the only people doing any work.

KL: You were the only...

SN: I think Firm16GB's did some of the front...

SL: Well that was nothing to do with Urwins though.

SN: Oh really. They weren't working for Urwins?

SL: No. This was just the ceiling. Which was why it annoyed me so much that a I know how much more they were going to have to pay, just have somebody run it...

SN: Oh, I was under the impression that Urwins had managed the whole contract to Hes Hall and that all the other people had been working for Urwins.

SL: I don't think so. I don't think Firm16GB's would do that. I don't they'd work for Urwins.

SN: Oh no they have subcontracted quite a lot. You know the, um, station building in York...

SL: They've cut down so much haven't they... Yes

SN: They've subcontracted to that. So they're just doing the external leaf...

Phone rings

SL: Sorry

SN: *(To KL)* It's a huge conversion project. They're building... it's a quad building?

KL: Where's this?

SN: It's the old station. It's just by...

KL: Is it just inside the City Walls?

SN: It's just inside the City Walls. They had to break a hole in the City Walls to get the trains through. Because it's a quad, the trains used to have to go in and come out again, they didn't go through. So it really quickly became outside of its useful life...about 15years or something...so the building's just been like ad hoc use for offices ever since. But it's grade II* listed because its associated with a really important architect whose name escapes me, but the main contract for that is Millers out of Wakefield who are a big building contractor with ahead office in Glasgow...Firm16GB's are just doing the external leaf.

SL: *(About phone conversation)* You know when people don't respond quickly you wonder 'are you listening, have you heard me?'... *(To self)* Ring Friday to confirm.

SL: Right, the works we were doing on the ceiling, they're massive, massive pendants and they'd had De Silva's in.... De Silva's are a specialist plaster company... actually they're a conservation of...

SN: Conservator. They do paintings as well, don't they?

SL: Yes. So they'd had them in to a very major, very expensive report. Which was pretty worthless. Because what we found when we went in. These pendants came down about 4 foot. They are massive. And they are lathe and plaster strangely enough. You'd think they were mouldings, but there's a post down the centre and then it's fixed with pieces of wood like this and then lathe and plaster around and the mouldings over the top. So they're hollow. And what De

Silva's had totally missed was that they were rotten down in the...because we said 'we need to know what's going on in the centre of them'. Now, they were horrified because of course this means cutting into...but if you have to find...and we said 'we can put this back, we just need to cut it off, look at it, check it and then we can make it look perfect again. You'll never know'...which is fine, because sometimes you just have to go in and...and if one of them dropped they would kill somebody. And what we found was they were rotten inside, there was beetle and all sorts. So they'd had this report done, but they'd actually missed the main problem. However, so we got the job and we checked a few of these...they weren't all rotten. And we conserved it from above it – we worked all the way above it. And then came down and worked on cracks. And it was a superb job and you wouldn't barely see any difference. It might look a bit more smooth, but that's what conservation is about. You don't want it to...you know if it looked pristine and different it wouldn't be...conserving it.

KL: And so did the [client] encourage Urwins to come to you then?

SL: They must have said that's who we would like to do the work. But they employed... Urwins chose somebody who'd do it for a lot less money and then when it came to it, the person decided they couldn't do it., they didn't know what to do. And so Urwins came back to us and said 'will you look at your price again' and Joseph was talking to them and I said 'just tell them no way'. I'm not going to start...we, you know, we priced it tight because we wanted the job. I'm not going to start buying work to work with somebody who, at the last minute, was it they that...they'd asked us to do the job... That was it...they'd asked us to do the job. Friday night before we started, it was October last year, Friday night before we started on the Monday they rang to say 'sorry' and I hadn't signed anything at this point, which was again my naivety, it's like that, you know, that job you said. Friday night got this call, after work, in the evening, message 'sorry we've got somebody else to do it cheaper'. So, I was, I got, I went out, then got done by the police for talking on my phone because I was 'your just not going to believe this...this is really...'. And, um, then Monday came, and I don't know exactly what happened but in the end this chap just couldn't do the job, just didn't have a clue. So they came back to us and said 'but can you match the price' and I just thought 'you've just got to be joking'.

KL : Yes.

SL: I don't do massive mark up. The price is what the price is. So when somebody asks for something off, if I think it's that sort of person I sometimes put a little bit of a mark up on to just drop it off again. But I mean, that's very rare. That's if I really think somebody's a bit shifty and not very nice. But on the whole the price is what it is. I don't muck about trying to cheat people out of money. You just work to make everybody happy. And be able to pay all your wages. So, anyway that's how we got that job.

KL: I mean given...because it is quite interesting that you've got obviously the skilled workmen and then you're, sort of project manager. I mean did you feel therefore you could have just been the main contractor then?

SL: Yes absolutely

KL: Because you would have those skills.

SL: Because two men on site, it's not difficult to manage that. They'd both...they had to have an asbestos awareness course...but that's, you know, it's half a day. And it's a shame that people feel they have to get a separate contractor because they pay so much more for that privilege.

SN: It happens a lot with big organisations doesn't it?

KL: Yes.

SL: It's all I think down to health and safety now, the faffing on, the nanny state, you know. This is where you'd hope that this heritage...conservation umbrella would help to get the right people in without having to get umm...you know, they'd get known for the skilled workmanship and their capacity to be able to manage a job on their own. I mean, Eldon's a time served joiner as well, which is one of the things you sometimes need, so we have somebody who can do the base, the woodwo...the base so to speak. I mean they're all very capable, but Eldon's a time served craftsman so you feel, 'ok he can cover that side'. And that's about all you need on this sort of work.

KL: So when you say health and safety, what sorts of things are you referring to? You know when you say that's what they're looking for.

SL: Because of the implications if anything...but not every company has a good health and safety errr...not a good enough anyway...

SN: Insurance policy?

SL: Yes, but also the...vocabulary gone...your err what you have written up as your health and safety policy. The actual...

SN: Ok, just the policy...

KL: Oh right, so they're looking for a policy...

SN: Yeah, they're really thick aren't they...they're really onerous...

KL: Do you have a policy?

SL: I got somebody in, a specialist to do me a health and safety policy, and it's very good, I mean I've been told it's very good. I wouldn't know personally if it is, but when we've worked with Borough Councils I've been told...because normally they say 'oh yes... send it through and you'll probably have to sign something of ours'. And then I'll get one back 'oh that's absolutely perfect, you know, thank you, yeah'.

KL: Right...so you've got a health and safety policy...what about other things...

SL: Risk assessments...

KL: Like insurance, because that seems to be quite an issue these days?

SL: Big insurance yep...well you have to have...for public liability and...

KL: Would you have that for whatever the job or is it just certain clients or...

SL: No we have to have it, it's obligatory.

KL: Well I was perhaps more thinking of the amount of the insurance...

SL: Sometimes I increase it for a job, it might be increased if...it was increased for working on Somerset House in Halifax where of the ceiling had come down – eyuhh! That was a scary one, it was very loose and if it had gone we'd have needed major insurance on that.

SN: So is Somerset House, is that owned by the Local Authority?

SL: Yes, I think it is. Yes, I think it's Calderdale Council.

SN: So then you worked directly for Calderdale Council?

SL: Yes

SN: And were they just having the ceiling replaced or was it part of a bigger project?

SL: It was the same as Doubleday – having it held from above because the nibs, you know the lime on the laths, the nibs had gone and it was just ready to drop. So even as you worked on it, it could've just gone. But luckily we managed to...steadily away. And also it was right up in a very filthy, dark, sooty roof space, so we had to clean before we started and all just really carefully. Because there's no point in trying to do anything on to dirt, it would just be pointless.

SN: Did you have to tender for that one then?

SL: I can't remember...it's a long time ago...Thomas did that one. I don't even know how we got that job. Possibly word of mouth, and no, it feels like, that's what I recall. Somebody saying 'I think this is the person you want'.

SN: Do you think you're working less and less on public sector contracts then?

SL: No more

KL: Right.

SN: Right, ok.

SL: Definitely.

KL: So what sort of people are you working for? Is it mainly Council's or...

SL: What...who are we working for at the moment? Look in the book...there's two National Trust jobs there. A big country house. A couple of...a little bit of residential...some Local Council, country house, National Trust, National Trust. Just finished a house that was water damaged from last Christmas. Yes a house...err...some time over Christmas...I remember ringing Joseph up and saying 'do you mind, just half a day?' he said 'oh, I'd love to'. He'd had enough of being at home would you believe! So we went to look at this property and it had started in the roof, so the whole house, three floors, and one included the most massive, beautiful ceiling rose, which I've now sold four of, because we had to copy it.

KL: Yes, so you've got the mould or...

SL: Yes, we've used it in different places. And it is fabulous. We've just put one up it...actually we put three up in this house in...that a chap is doing up in Darlington's. And it costs £1500 to put it up. It takes two days and I don't know how many pieces, but it's absolutely stunning. Absolutely amazing. So you're just overwhelmed...and it's totally Victorian...this house is totally Victorian. It looks...I can't describe it, just so inkeeping, it is so right for it. Now, how did we get that job? Oh, from Swinton Castle...

KL: Oh right yes...

SL: You know Swinton?

KL: Yes

SL: Mary and Kyle had had this chap in to all their telephone and electronic, internet and everything and they had mentioned to him about us. And they got me in to do his house. But that, although it's not a country house it's been a major restoration. Insurance jobs. What's Fairfax House under? York Conservation...

SN: Trust? Is it York Conservation Trust?

SL: Yes. Yes, we're looking at that. Big country house...

SN: I think only one of those is really Local Authority

SL: Yes.

KL: Mmm.

SN: Most of the others are sort of independent or charitable sector...

SL: We've got one...a...York...near Redcar. Coast and Country Housing...I think that's...

KL: Ahh yes...

SL: Is that Local Authority type?

KL: It used to be and they've kind of hived them off...

SN: A housing association?

KL: Yes, yes. I'm going to be doing some work with them actually...a different project, yeah. Same sort of thing but as a social enterprise...

SL: We did do a lot for Middlesbrough, Stockton and Hartlepool Councils at one time. That's gone quiet but I wonder if that's a lot to do with them not spending at the moment. We did the Carnegie Libraries...

KL: Yes. So how long is it then since...?

SL: About for years

KL: Right.

SN: Oh ok, I know some Carnegie Libraries

SL: Mmm two – they were lovely..

KL: And that would be a charitable institution?

SN: It was when they were built, but they were built in the late Victorian period and they're all over...I saw one in America...

SL: Oh really...

KL: And they vary as to who the ownership then...

SN: Yeah

SL: Yeah they're under Council's generally I think in this country...because libraries...

SN: I think Carnegie was English or Scottish, he was from Great Britain, so I think they are mainly here.

SL: Yes.

KL: There's one in Leeds I think that's Carnegie. Don't know whether it's a library but I know there is...

SL: Lovely buildings

SN: Yeah, they built, he built quite grand buildings everywhere. But I think the ownership maybe varied. It might be that those three are all looked after by the Local Authority.

KL: Mmmm

SN: I can't remember now, the one I know well, whether it was owned by the Council or not. It wasn't the name library, it wasn't owned by Cheshire Libraries.

KL: Is Nostell Priory, is that private?

SL: That's National Trust

KL: Oh it's National Trust is it now?

SL: Mmmm

SN: The family still live in half of it, or one wing.

KL: So it sounds as if, it sounds just from what you've read out as if the National Trust are probably...

SL: National Trust I get quite a lot, and a lot of, I suppose, it's the networking, of country houses. Recommendations.

SN: The Historic Houses Association?

SL: No, just literally private estates.

Redacted

SN: Really, really nice guy, but I said to him what I was interested in and he said 'well you should contact' you and then Firm02CJ, who we're going to see this afternoon.

SL: Haha!

SN: They repaired all of the their sashes.

SL: Yes! This must've been quite recently then?

SN: Yeah, well I've only been in Yorkshire for two years, so...

SL: Oh right!

SN: It's probably about 18months ago.

SL: Yeah we've done a lot of work for Robin.

SN: Right. Robin, that's right.

SL: Yes, we did their...we just did their bedroom recently. In fact it's on the website; there's a video of it. It's really nice, at the bottom of the first page...

KL: Where are they? They based?

SL: Richmond, Usk Hall. And it shows making, it's a barrel ceiling, well actually it's a wagon, you know, with a flat end, so it's a barrel like that but, flat end, and Karl designed...

SN: Really...

SL: Yes. Designed it all, and made a little model and I took it up there and sold it. And it was when work was really tough, which you'd think it was now, but after Thomas died we'd been televised on Yorksh...on Dales Diary...

KL: Oh right

SL: And at the end of it Luke Casey said 'well unfortunately since this was recorded...Thomas's died' and so, along with the fact that he had died and everybody knowing and then it's broadcast on the television, business just went. Because everybody thought we'd gone.

KL: Ahhh yes...

SN: Everyone thought the business would've gone...

SL: So then I worked really hard at networking, which is why I am proud of what I've done. Because I've kept four men and their families and mine going. And kept....there was a point when I was literally paying the boys to do jobs round here. I was paying their wages but they were just doing jobs for me. Because it got so critical. And I thought 'we can do this for a month, and then...'. But then the ceiling was the first thing that...

KL: Oh right...

SL: And after that it just seemed to start going up hill and pick up. But Karl designed it, and drew it out, and made it up, and everybody worked together on it. And there's this amazing...and Ed's filmed it and put music to it, like you have to, because nothing is anything without music, and it shows from not quite finished, because Ed didn't get there, but almost finished. It certainly looks like it's just about finished.

KL: Well I'll have to have a look at that.

SL: Yeah, do have a look. It's very, very nice. Very pleasant. So that was good...

KL: So, just think about the public sector then again, I mean is that something that you would be interested in doing more of? Or do you have a pref...

SL: Public sector?

KL: Things like work for the Local Council, things like that.

SL: Oh, absolutely.

KL: So you don't sort of think 'well I'd rather work on this type of contract or...there's no particular...

SL: No, no, public sector...the Local Councils have some amazing buildings. But unfortunately they don't seem to quite care for them. I priced to do...for Darlington, they kept having me back, I mean it cost me money because they kept putting it off and then saying 'can you come and re look at it because it's changed a bit and we are going to do it' and they've never done it.

SN: Oh really?

SL: Or maybe they have and got...and they did get somebody else in in the end I don't know.

KL: They never...they haven't communicated that...

SL: They never let me know. No...and three or four I went back to look at this and talk it over with them, but I wouldn't be surprised if they've put it off. Because it's a lot of money in...especially in a big hall. They own so many big halls. It could be 30 foot up, and the scaffolding involved and cordoning off when you've got people coming through...this was

at the leisure centre and part of it is an old part, and it's a massive hall and it's absolutely up in the Gods and these pieces would be colossal once you got up there, to repair. But I'm sure they'll have just put it off.

SN: But they do own lots of....what about people like the police? Because they sometimes have historic buildings, don't they?

KL: They do actually.

SN: Yes, I had to price for Ormesby Stables. Now Ormesby Hall is National Trust but the stables are...

KL: They've got the police horses there, haven't they? Yes.

SL: And there was some traditional lime plaster work throughout, which is ideal where horses are concerned, and lime washing, it's perfect. But, never heard a jiffy, never heard a word.

KL: So you put in...you put in a...

SL: Which is very rude...it does annoy me when they just don't get back and say, well 'we're not going to go ahead', or...

SN: It's a letter isn't it at the end of the day...

SL: Or an e-mail!

SN: Or an e-mail, even just an e-mail yeah.

KL: So did that actually go to the police or to the National...to the Hall.

SL: No, no, no I had to deal with this chap from the police. And I even tried to phone him and say 'how are you getting on? Can I be any help...further help. Let me know'. But nothing, nothing! We do a lot more through building contractors as well now...

KL: When you say building...you mean as a sub-contractor...

SL: Yes, much more than we used to do. Which does does make me a little nervous because of money. Because so many companies are going...

SN: Worried about not getting paid, yeah...

SL: Yes. A lot of companies going under.

KL: Yes...so are you going that way, really because there's no choice, or...?

SL: You can't turn down any work really. And a good job is a good job. You look at it and think 'oh yeah, I'd really like to do that', oh I've got to do it through a contractor'. But, you know.

KL: And are you finding that you're working with the same contractors increasingly...?

SL: I try to build up a good working relationship with, so that they will come to us. And they know...and architects as well...we've done some...there's a job we've just got to look at and, Matt Bacon actually, who did... (to SN) do you know Matt Bacon?

SN: I don't know...I don't know if I do...

SL: No? He was the architect on Doubleday and...he's very particular

SN: Ohh, no I think I do...he used to work for...well, he's in York isn't he?

SL: And he's...through Doubleday and how we worked and talked with him, he's recommended us for a job that we're going to go and look at now. So, that's always a good...to get the recommendation of the architect is really good.

KL: Yes, yes.

SL: And a good relationship. So that they know they can trust you and that you know what you're talking about. Which I don't always, but the boys do! So even if I don't know, I will...I'm just honest with people...and I think that counts for everything. I think people feel, you know, if you don't...it's almost reassuring when somebody doesn't know something, and says but 'let me get one of the craftsmen because he'll tell you in detail'.

KL: And if you're working through a contractor, does it make much difference in terms of the amount of control that you've got or the decisions about how the work actually takes place?

SL: We do have to dance to their tune. But no more really than if it was a private job.

KL: Right

SL: You do have to fit in and around...it's helpful in some ways that they organise plumbers and electricians, and they know when it's going to be clear for you to go. But they sometimes aren't so good. Sometimes they cock it up and you get there and you say 'you said the room was going to be free and we'd get a straight run at it', and they say 'oh well we didn't know that such and such' and then...but then they won't want to pay you for your wasted journey or your wasted time, which is really annoying. Especially when you stipulate that, you know, you really do need a free run at it. It's necessary to work with contractors now, because it does come back to health and safety and people being frightened not to...you know on big things like this...to...

KL: And so they would supply all that, you know, the policies...

SL: Yes and we just have to sign.

KL:...and insurance and everything...

SL: Well, actually they ask for my health and safety document and my risk assessment, which is generic and I just fill in the details. But they do have all their own stuff that I have to sign. Their own brief, you know.

KL: Is there anything else?

SN: No I don't think so, not really. We've covered loads of stuff.

KL: Yes

SN: I'm quite interested that you brought up the thing about the architects, because lots of people say that if...if things aren't done to a high enough standard then the buck stops with the architect sort of thing, it seems a bit like....

SL: So if an architect can trust the person working and have a good enough relationship they're going to go back to you time and time again. Which is why...and I think maybe because I'm more of a project manager I push much more to talk with the people that run...

SN: ...the architects...yeah, you're kind of like the voice of the guys aren't you? A little bit, in some ways...

SL: Yes, yes.

SN: So if it wasn't for you then they would find that more difficult.

SL: Yeah. And I think they have less confidence to...Joseph frequently says to me 'what will we say to them and how will we...I think you'll say'. And I look at him and he's 'yes I know, I know you'll know what to say. You'll just say it as it is'. Because he will worry about how to say something and how to speak to somebody, whereas I will just say 'it's just like that' and he finds that really shocking. But it's just because I come from a different place from him. I'm used to talking with anybody, and everybody should be approachable and be able to talk back. Communication is just everything. But, Thomas was the same, I think if you are used to working with your hands and you haven't had the privilege of great education, you feel on the back foot. Education plays such a big role in...and it doesn't have to be formal education....just to...Thomas was much, much better the further down the line he got because he self educated and, I think because of my, us being together, we interacted with people that made him realise that he was incredibly special. But he still had this tendency to be a little bit on the back foot.

KL: It's quite interesting...because obviously you're a cost to the company...but, but you are bringing all this, sort of different side, aren't you?

SL: But I do bring all the work in.

KL: That's right, exactly, that's what I mean.

SL: So my networking is what moves us forward. But yes, it has to pay me.

KL: So, you know, it's kind of an interesting sort of cost/benefit kind of exercise really.

SL: It's interesting when you look at how we...how our prices come out. We're never the most expensive. We're not as expensive as our main competitor but then we are more than your local chaps who think they can do it, and then find they can't. This lady who just rang me, she said could we do the lime work? And I said we don't have time at this point, you'll have to wait for the weather to...or for something. And she went and got somebody else who said they could do it and, they just slapped in on just like plaster, think and in three days, and it all fell off. So, we're up against people like that who will charge a fair amount, but obviously not as much as us because they'll just slap it on and get on with it, and maybe even do something in the afternoon to it, when it has to be left. It's all about time and curing, and knowing to keep it damp and that it sets its water. And it's not rocket science, it's just knowledge. So you pay for that experience and that time. I don't pay my men at plasterers rates, I pay them at craftsmen's rates, so of course it's going to be more expensive. But it's a traditional skill that they know how to manage. So yes, we're not the most expensive and it does cover my costs easily. But then I do work hard.

KL: Oh yes well absolutely, that's what I mean. There may be other firms who haven't got somebody with your role, but they're not necessarily going to be as successful because you're bringing a different aspect to the company, aren't you? Which some people might not appreciate the value of maybe...I don't know.

SL: No, they probably wouldn't, no. But there's a definite place for somebody to manage everything together. It's like being the building contractor, isn't it, within the company!

KL: Well, yes, yes.

SN: You must do other things as well like the HR, and, you know, you deal with the bank, and do all the pay slips and things like that...

SL: Well now, you see, this is, this is why I've got Sharon in the office on a Friday. Sharon can cover so much of it. So I actually have backed off from... I did all the book work and the networking, and I was just run into the ground. Now....and my brain didn't function properly, it had got so full. Have you ever been to that point where your brain is so full you can't almost string a sentence together? So, Sharon is Joseph's wife so she knows exactly how the business runs because she ran it with Joseph. And so she walked straight in and instantly just started. She didn't need me to show her anything. And she has streamlined things and she's only in on Friday, but she covers everything. And so much so that I've been able to let go of the accountants, who did the book work, getting it all collated, and did my wages, my VAT and PAYE. And she does all of that. So she's saved me money, which pays her wage. So then all we need at the end of the year is the chartered accountant to...

KL: Actually, yeah

SL: Just sign it off...

KL: Do the accounts and sign it off...interesting.

SL: And that cost will be a lot less because she's got it all...she's wonderful. And that's freed me up to be able to clean the house occasionally!

SN: Right then. I think we've kind of picked your brain to pieces...and I'm conscious that its 12:20. That's two hours.

SL: Do you want to go out to the workshop? They're ready for you anyway.

SN: Well thank you very much

KL: Really interesting

Afterwards, in the workshop: Took photos of the work and asked Karl about his experience gaining skill. He said it was pure chance that he decided to do plastering at college (his friend needed a room skimming) and when he did he realised that he had learnt about some of the modelling methods like plaster casting on his art course. Given that he had approached Firm01PI independently and they had just happened to need a sculptor, he felt that his being there was very much about lucky coincidences.

I asked them if they could run moulds in situ and model freehand, and they said they could but that they didn't get the chance very often. When I asked why, they said that this sort of work is prohibitively expensive and only conservation clients like the National Trust and English Heritage would commit to it. A private client that began interested would usually change their mind when they discovered the difference in price between hand modelling and casting.

We met all of the men and found all of them to be engaged and passionate about their work. Only Jim had a slight air of flippancy about him.

Kelvin Bishop, Firm02CJ. November 7th 2011

SN: Ok, so November the 7th, Firm02CJ, Ceri, Kelvin, I'm Sophie. You don't know that much about me, so I work at the University, my interest is in craft companies and their role in like kind of wider conservation, conservation of buildings. I'm quite...I've got...a little bit interested in the public sector, that's why Kim and I started working together. Because Kim is from the management school also at the University, I work in archaeology, and is interested in the role of SMEs and how they engage with the public sector, and how they...you know things like procurement and tendering and stuff like that. Is that fair *(to KL)*?

KL: Yes, that's fine.

SN: OK great, excellent. So we're trying to find out a bit more about how craft companies specifically engage with the public sector in Yorkshire. And so that's why we're kind of conducting a few of these interviews around different companies...you're only our second so...

CB: Right!

SN: Haha! Just to find out a little bit more really. And one of my particular interests in training because of the kind of shortage of traditional craft skills that's been identified by various government bodies and stuff like that, so the first thing I wanted to ask you about was how you developed your skills as a company and the individual backgrounds and stuff like that...

KB: I learnt the sash window side from on the job training with a company that I worked for once I'd left the armed forces. But I'm from an engineering background.

SN: Oh really?

KB: Yeah I'm a mechanical engineer from 22 years in the armed forces.

SN: Oh ok...

KB: And I wanted something completely different once I'd left the forces and it's more by accident that I fell into doing sash windows.

CB: We wan...we needed ours doing, didn't we? And he was short of staff and you *(to Kelvin)* sort of half joked, 'oh well I'll come and work for you'. And then you did, didn't you?

KB: Yeah I had probably about 10 months left in the armed forces before I left and obviously looking for employment once I was going to leave. And, like I say, it's more by accident...we asked him to come round and give a quotation for...to do our sash windows and then he came back four months later and said 'oh...', he's lost a joiner...

SN: Oh right

KB: So therefore the time frame for him coming to do any work on our property would be another 4, 5 months. So cheekily I'd said to him 'well, give us a job'. So I went to him on my resettlement side and worked for him for 7 weeks.

SN: But the army was still paying for you?

KB: The army was still paying us because I was still employed then. More by luck...the unit I was with here in Ripon was deployed to Afghanistan and I was left here on rear party, so I was fairly flexible work wise. I could still be on call for the army but I was actually working for this other gentleman.

SN: I see...

KB: So I was still being paid because I still employed by the armed forces until the following May. So then I could work for him for 6 weeks. By chance I did my own windows. So that was like him saying to me 'well, yeah fine, we'll have a look – it's easier for you to practice on your own windows, not to practice on other customers'. So I did 6 weeks and at the end of the 6 weeks he said 'well once you leave the forces, if you want a job give us a ring and you can come and start with me'.

SN: Oh really? Right.

KB: Yeah. So when I'd left in the May, basically I left on the 14th of May, on the 1st of June I went and worked for a company in Harrogate. And worked for him for probably 18 months 2 years.

CB: No, it was a bit longer I think

KB: And like I say, he made too many false promises. He wanted to expand his company and he was saying to me basically 'I'm looking for someone to manage my company for me, because I'm getting on in years. Would you be interested in doing that?'. And I said 'well let us learn the trade and that first, so I know what I'm actually talking about' and then progress us through his company. But it just got further and further on, and so that in the end I'd said I'll look at the market and whether there's enough within the area to take on another sash window company. So I'd said to him 'right, look, you've made too many promises. I'm going to leave'. I didn't tell him I was going to set up another company, but like I say when we did do the market research, it was obviously there, and when we started it was just Ceri doing all the admin side and I did the renovation side for the first 12 months and then we took on another employee. Because it was getting...on the health and safety side, some of the windows are quite heavy and me being left on site by yourself, it's alright being...the sole trader side, but you've got to look at the implications of if anything did happen. Because there's some properties we go into, that they leave you a key to the property to do the work. There's nobody else on site there.

SN: Oh right, ok.

KB: Yeah, as a sole person, anything that did happen...because you're using a lot of machinery. Plus the weight of some of the windows is quite heavy....it become too much for me after 12 months doing by myself...that we needed that safety put into place. That's why we employed another chap who I'd worked with before.

SN: Right ok.

KB: So obviously he knows the job, we didn't have to do a great deal of training to bring him up to the same standard as what the company was expecting, so it worked out well. Because, like I say, the time frame with a small company to take on someone who isn't trained, it takes a lot to bring them up to the relevant standards, because on the construction side a lot of the joinery is new construction based. It's not....

SN: What, in college?

KB: Yeah, it's not restoration based. And when you get on to the restoration side all the heritage side comes into it. And like you say, when you're working on listed buildings it's no good just having an overall joiner, you need to know

what you're actually doing within that framework. And a lot of the construction side is more the new build side now, not, like you say, not the older trades coming through.

SN: Right, ok. So do you have any formal qualifications? Like did you go to college at all?

KB: To do joinery?

SN: Yeah, or like as a...an on-site qualification or?

KB: No.

SN: Nothing at all?

KB: No.

SN: Right ok.

KB: All my qualifications are City & Guilds...

SN: In mechanical engineering...

KB: ...engineering from a mechanical background, not a timber construction based.

SN: Right ok.

KB: And like you say, the biggest problem we find is even with the construction side there's no criteria for restoration of sash windows. It's either joiner or carpenter, which are two completely different trades. Because a lot of site joiners won't touch any restoration within the sash window, they'll put a new one in for you but they won't do any repairs.

SN: Right ok...

KB: And it's the same on a lot of new builds. If they go in even to renovate an old property they'll look at the cost implications and say well it's easier for them as a building company if they're going to rip all the internal walls out, to rip the windows out and put new windows in. Because then they can have them made off site, they're not having to have another tradesman on the actual job itself. Plus they can run their costs within the construction side as one big company. Which is half the problem we find...we have to then go on as a sub-contractor, on-site, with whoever the main contractor is, which has all different implications on tax, national insurance, health insurance when you go on site, it's...plus payment is the biggest problem as a sub-contractor going to a main contractor. If they're on-site for 12 months and we then only do the restoration side, we then have to wait through certain periods of their build sides, so it's then all signed off by whoever the main contractor is, it then has to be signed off by the customer, it has to then go to their accounts department and they have a 90 day payment period, which as a small company, it's not ideal for us to work along those lines.

CB: I'm going to have to...I'm sorry, it was really nice to meet you and I hate to run off, but I'm sure you're in good hands (*leaves*).

KL: Thanks a lot

KB: So...

SN: So, when you originally decided to get your windows...get your windows in your own house changed...you knew that you wanted to have them repaired and not replaced?

KB: Yes.

SN: Right ok.

KB: Yes, we wanted to keep the original windows within the property. We didn't want them taken out and have plastic windows put in.

SN: Right ok yeah.

KB: We wanted to keep...obviously with an old property...have it as it's supposed to be not...you can go round any street and see Victorian properties with plastic windows in. It spoils the complete character and look of the building and we wanted to retain the look and character of the properties that we're actually going to work in. That's why we only work in timber, we don't work in any plastic.

SN: Right ok.

KB: Everything we do is all timber based. Now, whether that's Yorkshire sliders, casement windows, or traditional sash. So long as it's timber then we work to either restore and repair or replicate whatever it's got new into the original framework of the building.

SN: Do you do double-glazing as well as single?

KB: Yes. The double-glazing side...it depends again on the property. A lot of people now, because of the energy costs, want to have double-glazing. Now if you take an old Victorian sash, you're limited to what double glazed units you can actually put in without having to put a whole new window in. You can replace your two sliding parts, have new sashes made to house a double glazed unit, but that again depends on how thick the actual sashes are within the sash itself. Because the range...depending on the age of the property...they can range from 40mm to 55mm.

SN: Oh really?

KB: Yeah. Because the older properties use very, very thin sashes with just one, single pane of glass in. Now, when you're trying to put in a double glazed unit you have to conform with the building regulation side, and now it's gone down to 4-12-4, being a 4mm piece of glass with a 12mm cavity with a 4mm piece of glass. Now, you've got to then have 10mm externally to hold the glass into the frame and roughly 10mm internally to support the glass unit. So if you've got a sash that's only 40mm thick, it can't comply with the current building regulations. But, if, so long as you're not taking out the whole frame as well as the two sashes it comes under restoration...

SN: And you don't need building regs?

KB: And you don't need building regulations.

SN: Right ok.

KB: But, you're then governed by your double-glaze regulations. Because they have to cover by the conservation side on your u-values. So you've got your glass side on the u-valuation and then you've got your building regulations for new windows. And you're limited, when you're working on old properties, even putting in a new window. Because if you rip the whole window out, frame as well as the sashes, in an old Victorian property, when you're putting in a new window to comply with current building regulations, your whole box frame then becomes 30mm thicker than what the original is, obviously because your sashes then have to be 30mm to take the more robust double glazed units. But when you look at a Victorian property, you've got an internal and an external wall. When you look from the outside you

only see about an inch and a half of the timber frame. There's actually five and half inches, where you sash weights would be hidden.

SN: Right...

KL: Yeah, yeah.

KB: So when you look at...can I borrow your pen a sec? So when you look at...from outside...you would see basically about that much of the timber frame, but it's actually there. And that's your internal brick. And then what they do is they put a cover timber moulding into there, so you've got 5 inches hidden behind in the brick work, so externally that's what you would see brick wise and that's what you would see on the timber frame. So when you look at the sash window externally, that's what you get on an old Victorian property. Whereas new builds they just basically build a wall and you can slot in a whole new box frame into that cavity. And you just put sand and cement filling on the external and then they'll put a cover moulding, once they've built in the new plaster board, up to that window. Whereas on the old ones they build sand and cement plaster work up to there...you've then got a cavity where the old box frame would fit it. And then, when you look at an Victorian property internally, there's a cover moulding fits in there to hide the gap between the two...the timber and the brick. And that's your biggest problem, the space you've got from your external brickwork to there is only 140mm, where as when you put in a new one it goes to 155, which means your internal wall...that box is then 25-30mm thicker...

SN: Sticking out over it...And you lose the reveal, don't you.

KB: Yeah...

SN: On the front, like it makes a difference...

KB: The problem you've got is you then up with the internal wall like that and your box then comes to there, which means you've then got a lip. You've either got to replaster board all that internal wall around your bay, or, like you say, the customer will either have a step put in there with a timber piece and then your moulding put on, but you're ending up with another 25-30mm from your brick wall, which shouldn't be there. Your whole window's then coming in and then you've got the same problem on that side, all your internal window boards then have to come into the room another 2 and half inches. It's not as straightforward as just putting in...a brand new window into an old property.

KL: No, no.

SN: No.

KB: And because we're governed by the building regulations, we can't change the look. We can make sash to match into the hole to look the same from the outside, but it's the internal sides that we have the problems with on the building regulations. Like you say, if we can get away with...if the frame is still fine...we just replace the two sashes, the two new ones, with new double-glazed windows in and obviously balance them off with the correct weights and fit them into the existing frame, that comes under restoration. But it depends what the customer is after on the restoration side. We can put in a minimum 4-6-4 unit, which is still part of the u-value side, it goes below 2.2 but with the current building regulations, they're now saying we have to put a minimum of 4-12-4 double-glazed unit it.

SN: So high...

KB: It gets more and more complicated. Like I say, if the rules are going to be changing more, especially on the conservation side, especially on the double-glazed unit bit, we're going to start losing what we can actually do within the original Victorian properties, on their sashes.

SN: There is one clause in the build...is it Part L? On u-values...in the regulations. It does say something about, if it's a heritage site, or...

KB: Technically if it's a listed building

SN: I don't think it uses the term listed building. It think it just says heritage, so I think if you've got like, I think it depends on the...it's building regs vs. conservation if you know what I mean, so it depends on who you're dealing with basically. But yeah, these are the sorts of building that are most at risk, because they're not listed and they're recognised....are you in a conservation area or anything like that here?

KB: Yeah.

SN: You are.

KL: Well that would make a difference presumably...?

SN: It can do....

KL: That's different from the listing?

SN: Much different. It's protected from demolition so you can't demolish anything over something arbitrary like 60cubic feet, and then, but they have to put in more legislation more restrictions, the Local Authority does, to remove permitted development rights, which means you can't change your double glazed windows, or put render on or change the roof covering, or remove chimneys or anything like that. But very few do it. Don't they?

KB: The other problem is you've got discrepancies between different Councils...

SN: Oh absolutely...with conservation area you have yeah.

KB: And the same on the listed building side. We did a property in Newby Wiske, next to the police college, where the front of the properties is listed.

SN: Right

KB: But over a period of probably 50 years, they'd built an extension onto the existing listed part and where they'd put in a new window on the side elevation, the actual listed part went through and cut the window in half.

SN: Oh right, ok.

KB: But the windows that we were going to replace were double glazed. Now when we put, or the owner put, the listed buildings paperwork in with the relevant drawings, they said he couldn't have double-glazing, but he'd already had double-glazing in place.

KL: Right.

KB: And we'd already done windows for the next door neighbour, although on the rear elevation of his property, in double glazing.

SN: Had he got permission for that?

KB: Yeah. And they were both listed buildings, and they were both from the same Council. So then we had to wait, we had to resubmit paperwork over about a 12 month period, and they still wouldn't allow him to put in double-glazing. They'd allow him to put in slim light units, which the only company that would manufacture them at the time was a company in Scotland. Now that company would not supply to trade, would only supply to the customer. Which means then we had to have all the new joinery made, I then had to give him all the measurements, he then had to phone and order the glass from the company in Scotland, he then had to have it delivered to his own house, we then had to go and collect it, I then had to go and install it into the units, we then had to go and install the windows into his property, and then the listed buildings gentleman came out and had a look.

SN: Pleased?!

KB: Yeah, but it was just a strange anomaly between two properties. The gentleman who we did on the left hand side of had single glazing in, old Yorkshire sliders, but they allowed him to put double-glazing in. Yet this gentleman already had double-glazing in place and they wouldn't let him change it.

KL: What sort of time...was there much time gap between them?

KB: There was probably...well he'd submitted his paperwork when we were...had already had clearance to do the next door neighbour's.

KL: So it's quite close together...

KB: Yeah.

SN: Was there a change of person...was there different...

KB: Not that I know of, no.

SN: Gosh.

KL: How bizarre.

KB: Whether, like you say, whether or not he'd upset them in some way. I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know. But basically it went through our door to his door. That's the proximity and the two houses were joined and the front elevations were all listed, like you say, his upstairs were all double glazed and round the side was double glazed. It was just a strange situation.

SN: That is strange.

KB: But like I say, that's one of the issues we normally get with, like I say, there's listed buildings, there's conservation, there's building regulations, and even within departments some of them don't even speak to each other.

SN: No, no they don't...

KB: And like I say we've had clearance before where they've turned around and said 'there's your paperwork', done and dusted, signed it off to say we can do it. Then we get a phone call saying you shouldn't be doing that, you should be doing this.

SN: Oh really?

KB: Yeah. Especially when, like I say, with the double-glazing side on the conservation issues, when we get listed buildings, it's not really a problem. Some Council's are so straight, if it's a listed building they won't allow any double-glazing and now secondary glazing issues. They just say 'no you're not touching it'.

SN: Oh really, no secondary glazing?

KB: It goes...well we don't touch any secondary glazing anyway.

SN: Do you not do it?

KB: Not. It's not, it's not what we specialize in. It's...they're a completely different set-up for whatever the windows are. And, we'd rather put in the service and draught proofing side, which eliminates 90% of what the draughts are and makes them obviously work a lot better. And it doesn't the windows look ugly from the internal side. Because if the secondary glazing units have to have a framework in there, and on some of the Victorian properties there's no internal framework to put it, especially if they have a shutter system in there, because then that alleviates them having the shutters working, because they have to have a framework in there to have the secondary glazing. So it's swings and roundabouts what's...the secondary glazing side or the draught proofing. It just depends what the property is and what the values are to the customer.

SN: Before e like move on to sort of the company and the public sector and stuff like that, could I just ask you, like, where you get your timber from. Is it local?

KB: Where? It's from local suppliers within Knaresborough.

SN: And do you have a special type...do you prefer like hardwoods or softwoods or...

KB: It depends what...we use both. The softwood side we use is engineered timber. It's a softwood with all the knots and everything removed from it, it's binded with glue and epoxies to make it a more stable timber. And the hardwood, it depends what the actual customer's after at the end of the day. Because it's all down to cost with timber; obviously hardwood's probably four times more expensive than what the softwood is. And it obviously depends what property you're going to be putting it in. If you're going to be painting it, then a hardwood needs a specialist paint put onto it, whereas a softwood you can put basically any colour, decide you're going to put onto it... Like I say, it's personal preference to the customer, what they want to pay timber wise and what type of windows they want putting into their properties.

SN: So if you were matching...if you were just repairing a window rather than replacing it, would you try and match the timber ever?

KB: To a point yeah. Like I say, you can't really bond a softwood into a hardwood, they've got different properties. A softwood might be more flexible than what the hardwood would be. But, like I say, 9 times out of 10, if...on the hardwood side, there's not a great deal of repair we do on the actual sashes, the hardwood side's normally within the sill sections.

SN: Right ok.

KB: Because a lot of the hardwood sashes we've actually worked on haven't been in a bad state. We find a lot of the repairs we have to do are on actually newer windows, not the older stuff.

SN: Oh really?!

KB: Yeah, yeah, you'd be surprised. We do a lot of repairs to mid rail and bottom rail on windows that have been in anything from 7 years to 15 years.

SN: That new? I thought we were talking about, sort of, 1950's...

KB: Yeah. I've been to properties that've been built probably 10 years.

SN: And do you think that's the way they're built or the way the timber's grown, or a bit of both, or...?

KB: I think it's the manufacture side of the timber and wherever they're... obviously if they're building say 30 or 40 houses, they've got to reduce they're costs down obviously for their profit margins to be better. Now, if they're sourcing new windows from abroad as a job lot, they don't see how they're actually manufactured or where the timber's coming from, because the construction side's not really interested in that. They're interested in getting 600 windows on time, to fit into the properties.

SN: And cheaply...

KB: And cheaply. Because everything's down to cost. And if they can put them in and get 10 years, 12 years out of them, then that's their construction guarantee finished with.

KL: I was going to say, is that the 10 year, sort of builders thing you're talking about?

KB: Yeah.

KL: So they're looking really just to get past that?

KB: That's my personal opinion.

KL: Yes, yeah.

KB: But that's what I'm seeing more. Because a lot of the windows that are coming through are from European companies, because they're of a European standard, not a UK standard. And they're not putting traditional windows in. Everything's going in on... there's tilting slide mechanisms on plastic based internal... the scope is massive for the different types of windows that I've seen within new builds. But they're not lasting 10, 15 years.

KL: And it's... they're rotting are they? That's the problem?

KB: Yeah, they're rotting through. Some of the stuff that is in, once you've taken it out of the frame, it hasn't had a proper primer put in, or it hasn't been treated properly. It's basically a bit of timber that has had a lick of paint put on the external side and stuck in. If you go to look at any window, you don't know what's hidden behind it. You can see a window looks fantastic when it's brand new, painted, and on a new build, but you as a customer, so long as it slides up and down and works, you don't go into a house and say 'oh, well the windows aren't right', unless you're actually working within the trade itself. And that's my problem, I go in and I look at the windows to see what state they're in, because I know how much it would cost to replace them. But anyone buying a new house, you'd expect the windows to be fine. And so you walk around and see what size the rooms are and is the bathroom nice, is the kitchen nice? You don't think of the windows. But I've been out to properties at, even at Studley, where new builds have gone in, and the timber is starting to go soft, it soaks the water up when it's been 7 years old. North Stainley, where the cricket

ground is on the right hand side, all them new builds round there. I've been to two of them properties and they've only been up, probably 15 years maximum, and they're draughty and some of them are starting to rot.

SN: Really? So all this u-value stuff in the building regs, which is meant to prevent draught and...

KB: But the thing is the u-value side only really applies to the glass. Not to the timber frame.

SN: Right, ok. What the thickness of the glass?

KB: Yeah. You can put...what they'll do is, they'll come out with a little machine and they'll stick it on the glass and it'll tell them how bit the cavity is between and whether or not it's been argon filled or...you shouldn't be putting air filled double-glazed units in any more. They should all be argon filled, obviously for the u-value side. But, it's on the u-value side that they'll come out and check the glass, not specifically what the timber is. Same with the buildings regs side; they'll come out and look at it, so long as it's safe they're not...I've never had any building inspector ask us what timber I've used or...they'll look at the window and go like 'yeah, that's fine', and they'll check the glass, obviously for the conservation side and for the u-value side, to meet with current regulations.

SN: So is quite a lot of your work replacing the windows of new housing as well as...

KB: It's both. So long as it's a timber window and people will ask me for a quotation then I'll go and look at it. No matter what age the property is.

SN: Right ok...I didn't realise, I thought...because you're called Firm02CJ, aren't you...

KB: Yeah.

SN: But you do all timber windows...

KB: So long as it's timber, because there's no great difference between a casement window, a Yorkshire slider and a sash. Obviously, the working mechanisms, but it's all timber. And the joiners shop I use can manufacture anything that I give them the drawings for, to match what is actually going into the property.

SN: Do you use a joiners shop, do you?

KB: Yeah.

SN: Right ok. Are they local as well?

KB: Yeah, Knaresborough.

KL: So do they actually source the wood then?

KB: I've got two companies that we use. One actually makes the new joinery for us. If I need new windows or I need to replicate one that we can't repair, then obviously I've got to give them drawings to the joiners shop. But when we do the draught proofing side and the restoration, the staff bead and the parting bead are sourced from a different company, because we then hold that in stock. The same with full sill, half sill, external linings, pulley style. Any repairs that we need to do, we can keep all that part of the timber there, but obviously if we need to have something made, then obviously that's got to be made by a joinery company. Because the costs for a small company to have the machinery...it's just not cost effective for us as a small company. And we'd need to have someone permanently either sash windows, staircases as a joinery company...not as a restoration company. The overheads for that side's

completely different. He has to be working 8 o'clock to 5 o'clock 5, 6 days a week producing, obviously sashes, staircases, doors...whatever else he makes. For us to do that, it would cost me too much money.

SN: So, the joinery shop that you use, do they supply a lot of people like you, or do they supply loads of different things, like dado rails for new building...

KB: I don't suppose...it depends what the joiner shop is. The one we use doesn't specifically supply dado rails unless you specifically need a certain type of moulding that you can't buy off the shelf. It's more a specialist joinery company, which is what a lot of them will do, but he does make sashes and staircases and garage doors and that side...French doors for properties, internal staircases for different properties. But he could have however many different companies come to him to buy his joinery, so if they wanted a window making then they give him the dimensions and say 'this is how it has to be made'. He'll then make it to your drawings. And then obviously you then...as an installer we would then go back to the customer and install.

SN: Right ok. So, if you were just repairing one would the joinery manufacturer just make the pieces that you need and then you would repair it on site.

KB: We'd repair it on site, yeah.

SN: Ok that's interesting.

KB: Because the sashes are made up of basically your top rail mid rail and bottom rail, which are...depending on what type of property it is, normally Victorians there is a standard size...

SN: What, right the way through the Victorian...

KB: You've got lamb's tongue mouldings and ovolo mouldings, which are the two most used in the Victorian property. They have one or two strange quirks to them, but it depends on the property, if there's a massive big property with 40, 50 windows, and they've had a lot of money then they might have designed their house round what they wanted, which means the joiners would have made the windows for that person, so that when we come now, 150 years later, we have to look at it and go 'oh, right', then we have to take a sample of it to see if we can still get the cutter to make that bottom rail. But let's say, when I go out to do a quotation, I'll be able to look at it and say 'well this is standard', and if it's not, then I need to make a slight little drawing. If the customer's then happy with the quotation, I then have to go back to the property, I then have to take photographs and specific measurements of how the curve is, how flat it is, how deep it is. Then I can take that to the joiner and say 'right, I need 2m of bottom rail or 2m of mid rail, it needs to be 55mm thick, it has to have this, it has to have a rebate on of 12mm', because they're all different, and we don't know that until we've actually gone on site to have a look at the windows. We wouldn't just take a phone call from a customer saying 'oh I've got 22 windows, can you come and restore them?', I have to physically go and see every window, because even within a property 5 windows might be fine on one elevation, they might not have liked it, and change it, for something different on the other side.

SN: Right ok.

KB: Some might have Georgian panes, where you've got 8 panes, or 12 panes, or 16 panes to the front elevation. They might have single pane or double pane on the side elevation, it's just different. Because it used to boil down to

cost. Obviously glass, they wanted more light within properties in the old Victorian days, when they set all the new building up for them, it showed they had more money. But over the long period of time designs have changed and people have said 'oh I don't want that, I want this'. So you've got to look at every different property with a different eye, and some sashes are 40mm, some go up to 55, 65mm. Some are 800mm wide and 1500mm high. Some are 3m tall by 1600mm wide. It just depends what's in there. Some are to floor level that then short up into the cavity above you, so that you can then step out into your garden, and they're still a sash window but they weigh 150, 200lb.

SN: I have seen that actually, but only in big houses. Like really big houses, only once.

KB: They're that varied in scope, you can't just say 'well it's a sash window'. Obviously to people looking at it, they say 'oh that's got a sash window, that's got a sash window', but until you actually go into each different property and look at the windows, there's a lot more to it than some people actually know. Even some people that live in the houses, don't even know that the top sashes work because they've been painted shut over the years, and they only open one window at the bottom, and they can only get it open about 6 inches, and they think that's how it works, but both top and bottom both actually slide past each other, fully. But because of the paint and the years, they've not been working properly. They're quite surprised when you get both of them actually working, they're 'oh, right...'.

SN: Well I've asked you loads of questions about practices and stuff now, so we want to find out a little bit more about your relationship with public sector organisations and whether or not you've ever tried to tender for work that is paid for by public organisations like English Heritage and the Local Authority.

KB: We don't get a great deal....you'll probably have to speak to Ceri more on that because she tends to deal with that side of it...but we tend to get...we've had Leeds University put forward and ask if we would tender. But the problem with that was there was 2 and half thousand windows...

SN: Is it round that square?

KB: Part of it yeah. They've got two big campuses and they asked me to tender for, obviously the two and a half thousand windows, but the time frame that they were putting on the work...obviously our website is very good and it looks like we're a massive, big company, but we're not, we're a small family run business. Now for myself and Lee, the lad that works with us, for us to do the refurbishment, which takes up to 5 to 6 hours per window, you'd be looking at 3 years worth of work. That's if we've worked every day. Now, they've got their own joiners on site, but they weren't going to employ them because obviously the size of Leeds campus, they can't take away five of their only joiners just to do restoration. But the time frame it takes to do a normal refurbishment is 5 hours, plus you then have to work around what their timescales are. Now the gentleman I went up to see didn't realise we were only a small company, he was expecting 20, 30 men to come on site. But like I said to him, it's a specialist job to do restoration, it's different if you're putting in a whole new window, you can work on the parameter that, if you've got 500, 600 windows, or 2500 windows, even to make them, he'd be looking at 7 months, 8 months, for a big company. You've then got 2500 windows to go in. Even if you said a window a day, you're still going to need two men. And the thing is they weren't just ground floor windows, these are 2 and 3 storey buildings, so we said we weren't...I gave him a price to do the restoration, but nothing came back...I think more because I don't think they were totally aware of the implications of

how long it would take to do restoration, to work round 2500 windows. I still don't know if anyone's actually started the work for Leeds Council on that property, because it's been probably four months that we got all the paperwork through and I'd been to see the chap, but even two of the small lodge buildings had 32 windows in a piece, and I'd said to the guy we can do the small ones within four weeks, at a push, but we don't know what we're going to find restoration wise, when you start stripping the windows down. It's completely different if you're putting a new window in, you know what to expect; you're going to take the old one out and put a new one in. Alright, you might find different anomalies within each property that you're going to put the windows in, but at least when you've done your survey you'll know what to expect. Whereas with restoration you don't, because a lot of the windows are completely painted shut, you're not going to know what you'll find until you actually get there and strip the window down. And that's when your 5 hours for restoration on 1 window could turn out to be 9 hours. So if you've then got a contract in place with the Council to do say 500 windows, you're then time limited because they'll then put penalties in for you to complete the work. Obviously because they need to have the contracts done and dusted. And when you're doing restoration, it's not as straight forward as putting in. And obviously a big company can go in, they could then throw in half a dozen more men if it's getting close to the point where a job needs to be finished by such and such a date on the construction side, they'll pile more men in from another site to finish the job and get it done with. Whereas we can't...we don't have that flexibility as a small company, which is one of the biggest problems of working alongside on the construction side, when you're going in, like I said before, we then have to be subcontracted to them, so then we've got to have everything in place for...to work alongside them, and we don't get paid as quick as we would like to for doing the completion of the work. And that side of it, as a small company, a lot of the stuff we do come in...obviously the Leeds one...2500 windows is an impossibility for us to do as a small company, but on the restoration side, I don't know any restoration companies within Yorkshire that could cope with 2500 windows.

SN: Really?

KB: Yeah. A lot of the restoration side is only small companies, maximum of probably 6 to 8 people, and even 6 – 8 people doing a restoration of 2500 windows is not possible in the time frame that...I think they were looking at, like probably a 12 month period, which is an impossibility.

SN: There's no way people could like come together?

KB: They're all different companies.

SN: Well yeah, like different companies...

KB: Ermm...no disrespect but I know how good I am. If I was then bolted onto another company and we were all doing little sections of it, and then our standard, you're then trying to compete, if they're standards drop and all they've got is 'such and such did those'...I've gone to places before where they've said 'ahh no, we never did those, that company did those ones', and because they don't really keep a record of who's doing what windows, all they've got is, say, block F, 400 windows, we could be working on one floor, the next day we could be going up and working on that floor to get it finished, another company could be doing the window next to us, because they'll then work through, obviously because the rest of the site has to be programmed through...you're not going to do one company in that corner so

we're not mixing with those...you might all do ground floor. So then, we'd do two windows, if they then comes out and the inspector looks at it and says 'that's rubbish, that, oh we never did that'. You then end up with 2, 3 different companies arguing amongst ourselves...'oh no, we're not taking responsibility for that'. And it's very, very hard...on a massive project, it's hard for the project manager to manage every different trade that's coming in. And then when you then start doing...especially restoration...to what point...if they say right 'this has to be finished by such and such a date'...if we pull all the stops out to get our job finished and the other company that's sitting on the window next to it thinks 'I'm not really bothered', it reflects on the window people. So that's why we tend not...if we're going on site...I've never gone on a construction one where they've had another company doing windows.

KL: That's what I was going to ask you...

KB: They've had one company, because then everything falls onto them, all your guarantees and everything else.

KL: So they separate all the different tasks out...

KB: They separate all the different tasks out...say you'll have electricians from one company, you'll have plumbers from another. Because you don't bring in two separate plumbing companies because...how do I put it politely...if, on the window side, if I said to the company 'right I'm going to charge you £350 a window', and the company that's working next to me is getting paid £450 a window...

SN: It's not fair...

KB: I'm not being funny, but people talk on site, and if you've got two companies and they say 'oh we're getting paid x amount blah de blah', then you'll get friction within site, because if he's getting paid £100 more than we are then we'll want the same rate. So that's one of the things with the construction side, they've got their pricing scale right through, on the construction, but on the restoration, when we come in to bolt on, they don't know what their costings are. Obviously they're going to cost to whatever the customer wants, but they'll try and get the cheapest cost from us, because we're a separate company. So the if you're then bringing in three different window companies just to get one project finished, you've got to either give them all the same pricing or you'll end up with friction on site. It's not easy...it's more complicated working on site because of all the other trades that's around you. When you're on a big construction site you're limited to where you can work depending on whether there's any floors in, because you've got to look at the health and safety side. If we're on site, obviously working on a window, and they're doing brickwork or sand blasting externally, we can't be close to that window, and if they're taking all the floor boards up and there's no floors in there, because they're all going to be redone, we can't work on that bit, so then it has a knock on effect to where you can actually work around the building, because it's not...it's not like working in a domestic house, where you can come in and say 'right, we've come to do your bay window', the furniture's moved off to one side, you come in, you can be finished within a day. You go on site, you've got obviously all the health and safety side, you come under them, you've then go to have all your briefings and everything else before you go in, and then you're limited...you're told daily 'you can work in this area, you can work in that area'. It's more labour intensive working on a construction site than it is doing the domestic side, yeah, Because if you work domestic, I'm my own boss, if you work on site, I'm responsible to somebody else, and he's then responsible to somebody else. And there's different rules and

regulations obviously once you get on site. The same with, we burn a lot of the old paint off, when you go on site, you've got to sign certificates saying that you're going to use heat guns, and they have to...there's only a certain time in the morning you can use it, and a certain time in the afternoon, because when the site closes down everything has to be cooled off. You can't just leave the site at 4 o'clock if you've been burning paint off, and just put your heat gun down because there's a possibility that you could get a fire. And then obviously, the health and safety side, it's all being built with different systems that are being used by different tradesmen. Same as plumbers, they all have different rules and regulations once you get on site. It's the cleanliness side, because if it's not a clean and tidy area there's that possibility for an accident or fire, whereas a domestic home, it's fairly straightforward where you're working. Once you start getting into construction side, it opens up a whole can of worms.

KL: So most of the work where you just go in as the contractor, you've got the work, is that mainly domestic then?

KB: Yeah the majority of it, yeah. We've done probably two...Woodhouse Barry we did a big contract for...with 38 windows.

KL: Woodhouse...?

KB: Woodhouse Barry. They're a construction company. And we've just done one for a gentleman called Jim Cropper in the Swan Hotel in Harrogate. Directly opposite they used to have an office building, over three stories. It's now being converted into a private dwelling and we've done all the restoration on their sash windows. That only finished probably about a week, 10 days ago.

KL: And the work that you do when you're a sub-contractor, what sort of properties would they mainly be then? Or what sort of work?

KB: It's exactly the same. The work doesn't change, the contractor changes.

KL: So...it wouldn't be domestic properties presumably?

KB: It depends what you call domestic. If...you can have a contract site set up to renovate a whole house with 30, 40 windows back to a proper home dwelling. Now it's classed as a construction site because everything...as soon as you go through the gate...it's a construction site, it's not a domestic house yet.

KL: Yes, yes. Right, ok.

KB: So therefore all the trades that are in there, doing replastering, rewiring, reflooring. It's a building site.

KL: Yes, yes. I'm with you.

KB: So that's a construction site to us, not a domestic home.

SN: Ok, but the clients are normally private clients?

KB: The majority of them are private clients, yeah.

SN: Right, ok.

KB: Cos they'll then get whichever company is gonna do...they'll tender out to whichever company wants to take on the whole project and then that company'll then deal out the tenders for...some of them have got their own plumbers, their own electricians, own plasterers, and they'll just come in and obviously bill the client for the whole job. But on the restoration side, that's when they have to get in a specialist company like ours. To do...specially when you're working

with the older buildings...to retain the look and the character. Then they can't just rip them out and replace them, it's too expensive. So, we'll put it obviously the service and draft proofing side. And strip all the windows back for them.

SN: So it's cheaper to do that, even though it can be 5 or 6 hours a window, if they were going to look the same?

KB: Yeah, yeah.

SN: Really? Gosh. So I wonder what they're going to do at Leeds. With their 2.5k windows.

KB: I wouldn't know, I wouldn't know. But with the timescales they were looking at, it's an impossibility. Unless they spread it over a longer period and do different parts of the campus.

SN: Do it in phases or something.

KB: That's the only way they'll be able to do it. 2.5k windows...it's not...even for a big company...you would have to have a permanent workforce there Monday to Friday. And not for 6 months, 12 months. Maybe 18 months, 2 years. And that's a long, long time to be on one site. Even on a construction site.

KL: Well the other thing is if you're fully committed to that, you can't keep your other customers going. can you? build up that side.

KB: No, you can't. That's one of the bigger problems when you're doing...the tendering side are normally private customers with a maximum of probably 60 windows, which is a lot for a household property. But when you get onto the commercial side, obviously Leeds campus is a commercial thing...not a construction thing...I don't even know where they would go to start...to get a company in. The option you had was to bring in three companies; that might be an option for them, but whether or not they'd get the companies in and tied up for that period of time...because a lot of restoration is domestic homes, not on big contracts.

SN: Oh really? That's interesting.

KB: Yeah. Because of the timeframe that it takes. 9 times out of 10, when you're doing the construction side on properties with 40, 50 windows they've either got one of the massive, big companies coming in, like Ventrolla, who have got franchises up and down the whole company. Or Everest. But their prices are so expensive...if the client can afford it and the cost isn't an issue. Or the contractor's looking to save money, so therefore they'll put tenders out to 2 or 3 other companies, which is what the normal practice. And obviously they'll gauge what the price is and what they're actually gonna get for their money. Cos it's not always best to go with the best company that's charging you £900 a window, when you can go with the smaller company, who hasn't got the massive overheads that other company's got, but can reduce their price down, but their quality. So they'll then go with the smaller, local company because it's at hand. If you go with a larger company, they're franchised out throughout the country.

SN: I know a bit about Ventrolla.

KB: So you're not guaranteed you're gonna get the same people coming to do your windows. They'll have a site manager who'll come out and do obviously a site valuation, and then send that to their head office, then they'll get the quotation to the customer. If the customer's happy with that quotation then, is gonna take Ventrolla, Ventrolla then get their franchise either from Middlesbrough or wherever else they are, and pool them in to work on that site. But it's all down to time frames when you're working on the construction side, because everything has to be done to a deadline.

Whereas with a domestic home, if I get any problems, I can always turn around and say to the customer 'oh I need to be back tomorrow'. Whereas on the construction side, if you're on site and that window has to be finished by Friday, and you get there Friday morning, and strip the window down and it all falls apart, you're gonna be there Saturday and Sunday to get that window finished. Because that's what the job entails. You need to get it finished on that time. And that's what the biggest problem, working on the construction side. It's not a problem with the work, the work would be fantastic if would come in and you could get on there and do what you're supposed to do. But it's the timeframes that...obviously everything boils down to cash at the end of the day. And timeframes, when you're on a big project. If things start to slip it has a knock on effect for everything else that is in that project. And the windows are no different. If we moved into say this room, and had 5 windows in, and they told me they had to be finished by Thursday, the reason it has to be finished is because the guys are coming to plaster the walls on the Friday morning. If I've not finished that because they fell apart, the plasterer can't come in, and they're paying that plasterer to then sit and wait for me to finish a window. Whereas with a domestic property you don't have none of that. There's more flexibility. And the majority of the big construction sites either have their own joiners and they're just putting new windows in. It's only when you get to older properties that they need to have the restoration that they then start tendering out to specialist companies.

KL: So on the whole when you're doing this subcontracting work, that's more the restoration heritage side, because they see you as a specialist?

KB: Yeah, because we're going in special and they're not ripping the windows out. Everything has to stay as it is.

KL: Right.

KB: Yeah, the majority of the time we wouldn't put in double glazing, we'd retain the original single glazed, like you would with a listed building. It's retained exactly the same, because if you're then looking at a property with 50, 60 windows, you could be looking at £50, £60k to replace with new windows. Whereas the restoration will come in at probably half that.

SN: So it does come down to cost really, but...

KB: Yeah, a lot of it comes down to cost. Everyone's the same....no matter what you're buying, we've found the last 12, 18 months, people are becoming more and more cheeky. You give them a price and they want 20% reduced.

SN: Really?

KB: Yeah, because they'll turnaround and...they'll play a company off against company. But that's common practice. I'll say to anyone I go out to 'please get three quotes', a minimum. Cos I know what the costing is within the Yorkshire area and I know what my competitors are charging. Because I've worked for a couple of them. So, and...unless you know the market, then you're out on a limb. And to run the business, you need to know what your competitors are doing. They can so 'oh well, I've had a quote from such and such', and I can say 'right, fine, if you wanna go with them, go with them'. But yours is more comprehensive. And they'll play it 'oh, we'll get back to you'. Because it doesn't always come down to cost, it's how you actually word and what you're actually going to be doing to the windows. So it's swings and roundabouts with them at the end of the day.

KL: So people might come in with slightly different views as to what should be done...a particular outcome. And therefore they're not entirely just judging two things that are the same and comparing costs?

KB: Yeah...sometimes it depends what you do. Restoration or the customer wants new. There can be a big variation between the new side...it depends where they're sourcing the materials from and what his overheads are gonna be. I wouldn't...whatever price I give them, I'm flexible within 10%. You have to be. But I'm not gonna cut my prices so far down that I'm not making a profit as a company, just so that I can get the job. I know the standard that we achieve, and I know what cost is...what we're putting out there, and I know they're getting value for money. And obviously it is down to cost with everybody, and they're all trying to save money. You can gauge customers as soon as you turn up and meet them, what they're prepared to pay by the tone that they speak to you. And what they're expecting. It's like we always say, it's not...just because you going to a big house and it looks like they've got money, necessarily means they have money. And it's exactly the same if you go in a house and think 'can they really afford it?'. We don't judge it that way, we go in and give them a price right across the board. Whether you've got £1million pound in the bank, or £500 in the bank, the cost of your windows'll be exactly the same. I'm not gonna look at someone and say 'ah well, you look like you've got about £5k in the bank, I'll give you more'. It doesn't work, but I know companies that have done that. But that's just the way it is. But everyone now wants a cheaper price. But you've got to look at what your profit margins are to what you can actually bring it up and bring it down.

KL: How far widely do you work then? You know, sort of how far...do you travel?

KB: We only cover...about an hour.

KL: An hours travelling each way?

KB: Yeah. We're looking probably about 75 to 100 mile maximum. Because by the time you take in an hours travelling, depending on what the weather's like, and where you're actually going to, you've got to then do 5, 6 hours work. And obviously the wintertime, when it starts to get dark...we've probably last year lost 10, 14 days because of the weather. Because of the location we are in Yorkshire, a lot of the properties we have are in small little villages, and you can't get to them. So last year we lost probably say 10, 14 days. But then that has a knock on effect because we've gotta re-put them back into the programme. And the thing is, because we're a small company, I've then got to go out and do surveys at 7, 8 o'clock of an evening. Or a Saturday or a Sunday. Because I'm installing during the day. Because I can't...sometimes I can leave the lad on site, so long as it's safe, but like I said before, we need to have two people there in case...it's alright if there's a customer still in the house, but if there's no-one there...because we have had a few occasions where we're just left with a key to get into the property. Do the work, put the key back under the plant pot in the garden, lock up. And then get a phone call saying 'oh well done, thank you very much, we'll send your cheque through the post'. But that's just the way it is.

KL: In terms of competitors, are they sort of close? Have you got kind of err very clear competitors in this area?

KB: There's two other companies within Yorkshire.

KL: Within Yorkshire?

KB: In Yorkshire. One's in Harrogate. I think the other one might still be in Harrogate as well.

KL: And you cover sort of similar areas then? And about the same size, or..?

KB: The other two cover a lot further afield. Erm, one of them...we tend not to touch Leeds, whereas these two companies target Leeds a lot. Plus they'll go Manchester, Sheffield, Huddersfield, Scarborough, Bridlington erm. The thing is we get a lot of enquiries for them areas, and because I used to work for one of the other companies, I just gave them their telephone number. Because I don't want the work, it's too far for me to travel, but I know they will. So that's what we do on that side.

KL: So, sorry, you say you pass them on to those...and do they reciprocate at all? Do they pass things onto you?

KB: I wouldn't know, I wouldn't know. I wouldn't even know if they know that I've gave them their telephone number to be honest.

KL: Right, so it's not something that you've kind of consciously agreed on doing?

KB: Oh no, not at all. No it's more of a friendly gesture than something I'm trying to gain back from them.

KL: Well I sort of think that covers most things.

SN: I think so yeah, I mean erm...I know that we talked about most of your clients being private, but I'm still quite interested in if you would...Ceri would know more about it than you...but do you know if any of your clients have gained funding from English Heritage or anyone like that?

KB: Some private customers gain grants and things from local councils.

SN: Yeah, yeah.

KB: But that's private customers...

SN: Yeah, and then they pay you?

KB: Yeah..

SN: I think what they'd do is pay you and then claim the money back from English Heritage, that's what they'd do. Of the council.

KB: A lot of it is to do with the listed building side, with different grant. Now we'll give them a quotation and they'll use that quotation in their application for grants from whichever council it is.

SN: Oh right ok.

KB: Because they're stipulating on the listed building side what they have to retain. Now we have had one or two customers that have had 50% of the restoration paid. We had...in Easingwold...we replaced the bay window and two front windows. We took the plastic ones out and retained it back to a timber, proper sash bay window. Now I know she was approached by the Council to retain...cos it's directly as you...

SN: Yeah, it's a prominent building.

KB: It's a prominent building...it's right on the corner. They approached her and asked her if she would change it, but I've not known what percentage she retained from the council side. I know she did say that they were giving her a grant, because she reapplied to them to have the rear of the property...

SN: Oh, but that was refused?

KB: But that was refused...because it was only the front elevation that was on the street.

KL: It's the streetscape...

KB: Yeah, cos she had full bay window ground floor and a bedroom and a bathroom first floor. And then she had four windows to the rear and one at the side. But because you can't see them from the road she then had to fork the cost out herself for the rear. But I know she did get a grant for the front side. It's not always on the big constructions sites, it depends where the actual buildings are...within prominence to obviously certain streets. And more so on the listed building side, a lot of people who have a listed building automatically will say 'I'm applying for a grant'. To see if they can offset whatever they're having done to the property.

SN: And do you know if any of the council's have like approved contractors or anything like that? And if you're on any of the lists? I don't think they're supposed to...

KB: We went through...erm...with a chap that deals with Mass..no not Massam...Bedale. I went and did a survey of 15 shops and properties within Bedale main high street and gave him all the owners a quotation for works to be carried out at the properties, because they're all listed. That was organised by a gentleman on their council side, who was trying to, lime you've just said, trying to get trades that know what they're doing on the listed building side together. No I don't know who else he approached, but we had one property came back which was one of the beauty salons, which we did two windows for restoration on the first floor of their property. And that's the only stuff that came back from...but that was the same she'd applied for a grant through the council and this gentleman was dealing with formulating contractors to deal within their council area that are local. So instead of saying 'right, look in the yellow pages and try and find someone', that might come from Leeds, Bradford, at least they had someone that was in that area that was in their council. It's not...it wasn't official.

SN: It's sounds more like they were just introducing the owners to contractors that they thought would do a good job, to me. If only one person came back it sounds like there might not have been a grant scheme...

KB: I don't know. Everyone we looked at was all listed.

[Phone rings]

KL: Just checking it's not me...you'd think I'd know my own phone, but I don't!

KB: There was about 20 properties down the main high street, from butchers to candlestick makers. You name it...jewellers. All had listed signings on each property. That, and the windows were falling apart. But obviously because they were gonna give grants out from the listed building side, this gentleman, from the Council had gone round each one of these people and said 'right, you can apply for the grants, I've got a gentleman coming up', obviously myself, to give 'em a quotation cos they needed to know what the cost was.

SN: Do you know how long ago that was?

KB: It might've been last year, or the year before.

SN: Only a year ago, ok.

KB: What I can do...I'll get Ceri to...Ceri'll have all the information on the computer downstairs, cos we would've done a quotation for each of the properties with the relevant telephone numbers for each of the owners of the properties.

Now whether...the beauty salon definitely got a grant in to do part of them, but they wouldn't give her a grant to do the other window.

KL: So you the only window company as far as you know then? Or were they getting a range of...

KB: I don't know who else they were getting to have a look round. We turned up on one day to meet this gentleman, cos he'd already pre phoned up all the people in the street...all 20 odd of them...and said 'I'm gonna come round, I'm bringing a gentleman from FirmCJ02. He's gonna have a look at what you've got and he's gonna give you a quotation for the works that need to be carried out'. Now obviously, without the quotation, they can't really put a grant in because they don't know what work's required. And we didn't hear anything else from the rest of the customers apart from the one...

KL: But do you think he chose you partly because of you being local and obviously the fact that you do the restoration?

KB: I don't know. You'd have to speak to...cos like I said to her (*the beauty salon owner*) she could still get three quotations. Even as a customer myself, I wouldn't just take the first quotation I got, I'd get two or three and see what...and compare one against the other before... The grant side's something completely different...it's the work that she wants to be carried out on her property. Obviously if my quotation's got more information in which is gonna make it easier for the listed people to read through and go 'oh yeah, that's fine, we know what he's doing, we know that he's gonna repair...it's gonna have 22mm glazing bars, it's gonna be exactly the same as what's coming out' then they won't have a problem. The problem the listed building side have is if you get a quotation and it doesn't make any sense to you, they then have to go back to the customer and it has to be made clear, and the customer has to come back to me. Cos the listed building people won't contact me cos it's got nothing to do with me. It has to go back to the customer. So then you're in a triangle. So at the listed building at Newby Wisk, we go back and forwards with the different drawings for the listed building side. Because next door had had double-glazing we thought there would not be a problem, but when it then goes to the listed buildings officer, there was a problem. But that's not ours, that goes back to the customer.

KL: How do you deal with all of the additional cost involved with this sort of stuff? I mean is it something that you can include in your cost but it's sort of arising almost after you've put a quote in perhaps.

KB: We give a free quotation service for any window we go and look at, whether we get the job or not, it doesn't really make any difference. But, if it's gone as far as them applying for grants through, there's normally...we're the company that's gonna be doing the work, because they wouldn't be asking us for all that information, unless their asking three or four companies and nine times out of ten that doesn't happen. If they've applied for a grant then our paperwork has already gone to the listed building people and there's only a query on some normallys within that paperwork, that has come back to the customer. Nine times out of ten it's all gone through and then whatever grant they've been allowed will then be paid to the customer. We would then invoice them, they then send that invoice through. So that...

KL: But I'm just thinking about this one at Newby Wisk, if you had to do sort of new drawings and go and have sort of extra site visits and things like that.

KB: No, we don't put any extra cost in.

KL: Right, so you absorb...

KB: On that one it was a long drawn out process, it took like I say 10, 12 months.

KL: But you kind of absorbed that, in effect?

KB: We just took it into the costings, yeah, yeah. When it's done by e-mail it's not...it's a bit extra work on our side here because obviously on the listed side they need four sets of drawings.

SN: And they ask for a big scale don't they, for windows? They ask for like what 1:2 they can ask for, cross section?

KB: Yeah, they can ask for. But I'd normally just draw an A4 size with all the measurements and everything else that it needs, then if he needs to get architect's drawings done properly, then that's the customers side.

SN: Oh...I see.

KL: Oh

KB: I'm not gonna be paying to have an architect to do drawings to be sent...if I pay an architect say £50, then drawings then get sent to the listed building people, obviously having four copies,

SN: Yeah, printing...

KB: And then they turnaround and say...well we've had it before, they said they wouldn't have a printed copy, they wanted the original drawings.

SN: Oh really?

KL: What, times four?

KB: Yeah. But that's just the anomalies you get with different council's. Some'll look at one photographed drawing and go 'nah, that's fine', sign the paperwork, staple it to the thing and send it back to the customer. Others'll say 'right, we need specific line drawings and dimension of everthing, from the size of the mouldings, to the thickness of the glass, to the cavity that's in there, to the gap that's in between the draft proofing and everything else. It just depends who you get. But, they're covering themselves. And it doesn't bother me, it's the customer that's going through that process, cos they can ask me for any drawings they want. I can give them a small drawing but I'm not gonna pay to have line drawings done because then it starts to eat into my costings. So we never get involved with that side of it. We can give them, near enough, all the specifications they need to have a line drawing made for the listed building side, and then it's down to the customer to do that side. We don't really get involved with the listed building people. Building regulations is completely different, we then apply through, if we put a whole new window in, we then apply through the building office for, obviously, to conform with the building regulations side. But listed buildings is too...they're all different departments...

SN: Oh I know yeah, it depends on which different council as well.

KB: And the thing is, I don't mean to be funny, but hen you get someone in who's temporary for a six week post, into the building officer's or the listed building officer's seat, they're a nightmare, they become power crazy. Nah, honest, the amount in Yorkshire it's....I've had one gentleman come out and just 'nah'. 'Who are you?'. 'I'm the listed buildings officer'. 'Oh, alright nice to meet you'. 'No'. 'What do you mean no?'. He said 'no'. 'What do you mean no?'. He says

'well I am only temporary, I don't want nothing. My file's this big, I'm only here for four weeks. No.' And the just walked away. I was like...and I looked at the customer and the customer was like...

SN: Come back in four weeks?

KB: There's your answer. He's only there temporary...

KL: It's a pointless exercise really.

KB: ...you'll have to wait until the different chap comes back.

SN: wonder why he even bothered to meet...

KL: Yes exactly. He might as well have put everything on pending.

KB: I suppose it's more out of courtesy his come out.

KL: I guess...

KB: Or maybe it was a nice sunny day and he wanted a drive out.

Laughter

SN: Ok, well I think that we've covered a lot of things really, most of it really. I'm quite interested in how you're not really involved with the grant system, but because you're a reputable contractor people...you know...you have been involved with grant funding properties like so. Also on the other side of it, you don't really get directly involved with big construction sites the public sector and other big organisations might be letting because of the processes and...

KB: The processes and the size of a lot of the jobs. We're a small company...the timescales that it would take, we can't achieve what they're asking. We can do the job but it would take us a little bit longer and the timescales they've got the construction...

SN: It makes you wonder what they do do doesn't it? If somebody like you can't take it on and you don't think there's anybody in the whole of Yorkshire that could...does make you wonder..

KL: Did you actually look at the windows? These ones at Leeds University?

KB: Oh yeah, yeah.

KL: I mean, there's a job there is there? They need work doing to them?

KB: Oh there's definitely work there. Because a lot of it's classroom and office based you then have to work a programme out to be flexible around obviously staff working on computers. You need to then say 'right, on Tuesday we're gonna be doing your room. You need to move all your stuff out of this office'. And they you can move in. Well they might say 'well you've got a day'.

KL: I'm just thinking of you sort of saying, you know, how are they going to actually...

SN: Yeah well how will they do it?

KL: Get this work done? You almost wonder....well presumably they have to...would there be some kind of...

SN: They might just send in...

KL: With their being listed...?

SN: I think they probably would be listed...

KL: Is this the one at Headingley, the Carnegie campus, they've got quite a lot of...

SN: That's the second time it's come up, Carnegie...

KL: Yes. That's what I was thinking. I went there not so long ago. Yes, brick with great big Georgian...

KB: It's got a three sided great big square building, with a big massive grass lawn in the middle

K: Yes, that's Carnegie campus I think.

KB: And then you've got car park going left to right and you go through to a little check point area and there's other buildings dotted all over the place. But that was only part of it, because Headingly's then split into two or three different campuses.

KL: That's right yeah.

KB: And that's what they were saying, it was for the whole campus, not just that one block we looked at. And I was like...

KL: I'm just thinking would they just give up and have them replaced? But perhaps they can't depending on the...

SN: Well maybe. Well it would depend on their negotiations with the Council. But I mean if they...if you said there's two lodges and both of them have got 38 windows in. If they were willing to split the contract maybe, would that be something that...

KB: Well that's what we said, that we were quite prepared to do the two smaller properties because they're nothing...they're only small offices compared to the big site. But...

SN: And you haven't heard back?

KB: No.

SN: No, nothing.

KB: I was went in explaining exactly what we did as a company, and the gentleman was more from the maintenance department because he's in control of, obviously the maintenance of part of the building, and he said he had four full time joiners, but just to keep them occupied within the campus itself, doing whatever repairs they needed to do, they couldn't afford to have them taken off. I did say to him 'well why not train up two joiners or get in two new joiners to work on your books, to work full time, just doing restoration around the campus. But even to have two people, to do 2500 windows is a three year job, three and a half years. And it's then having the specialist knowledge to do the restoration side. Now I don't know, obviously the joiners they've got are all time served joiners, but whether or not they do restoration. He said his guys can do patching here and there, but they can't do what we do because they haven't had the full knowledge of actually doing that side of the restoration bit. So, like I said before, on the construction side you have construction joiners who then go to college and do construction joinery, or you get a bench joiner. Now a bench joiner won't go on site, a bench joiner will make everything in a shop. Whereas a construction site, they'll do skirting boards, doors, they won't do windows because it's a private contract. They either put new windows from a sourced and then put that into the building, they don't do very much restoration side. And that's the biggest problem we have, no-one recognises restoration.

SN: Not in the college or in construction...what about Lee? What's his background?

KB: Lee worked for three different window companies. I only knew Lee...

SN: Oh you knew him from work didn't you?

KB: Yeah I know him from work.

SN: He was from one of the Harrogate companies.

KB: Yeah, the same one I was.

SN: So he had the same experience and things. Do you think that there is the two companies, cos I noticed when I moved to Yorkshire cos I'm not from Yorkshire, that there was two sash repair specialists in Harrogate, and it made me wonder whether that's to do with like the clients in Harrogate and the kind of character of the town...I don't know it very well but I get the feeling that people from Harrogate are quite proud of its heritage and its appearance and the way it is aesthetically. Maybe it's through the Council, I don't know.

KB: It might be more Council run than it is personnel run, because a lot of them have nice big houses, but it doesn't necessarily mean they're looking after them.

SN: Oh ok (*laughs*).

KB: You find that when you go to a lot of the older properties in Harrogate they've got to the stage where you can't repair them any more.

SN: Really?

KL: That bad?

KB: They're that bad..

KL: Neglected?

KB: They're just not looked after.

SN: Right.

KB: And some of it looks pretty from the outside but they don't work.

SN: At all, they don't open either way?

KB: At all.

SN: Right.

KB: Cos that's the biggest bug bear of mine. If I go into a property and I've got a frail lady there who...none of her windows are open, if there's any fire or anything within that property, how do they get out?

SN: Yeah, that's true.

KB: And it's the same as when I get people obviously coming down to cost. And they say 'well I'd like a nice new window in, but I don't want any of it to work, I just want it to look nice'. I say 'I can't do that, I want at least one window that you can open so you can get out', and that's on every room we'd go to. We're not gonna go in and say well, just because it looks pretty. You've locked yourself into the room, because you won't be able to get out of it once we've sealed it all up. But you'd be surprised how many properties we go into, even on the restoration side, that the windows are completely painted shut. On every floor, including offices.

SN: What about hotels as well? They must...

KB: Hotels should by law.

SN: And offices though surely?

KB: One window...I'm not sure if it's one window or one fire door per floor, depending on your access side is. And it depends on what floor you're on as well.

KL/SN: Right.

KB: Cos we have a done a couple of well used to be offices in Harrogate but they were converting that to a shop, but it had been offices before. But there was no, no-one of the windows actually opened far enough to get out of.

SN: That's unbelievable.

KB: You'd think there'd be regulations in place...

SN: There should be

KB: Yeah, especially as an office, I know the fire brigade have to have an emergency plan depending on how many people worked in an office block, go in and do an evaluation test, so they know exactly what floors, and where the exits are and know exactly what windows are working.

SN: Right.

KB: Cos obviously if there's an internal fire, they can turnaround and say 'well we know we can them out of there or we get them out of there' instead of going in blind, and going into a block where they're all on the top floor and you think 'well, how do I get to it' if the staircase is all burnt away and they're trying to get to 'em externally, and they know that if there's a door there and they can't get through to it there at the wrong window trying to find out where they actually are, so the big thing is with the fire service, they've got to know where the main exits are. Especially when you've got a lot of people in there. You'd be surprised how many domestic properties none of the windows open. And I'd probably say that nine out of ten houses I go into don't have any smoke alarms.

SN: Really?

KB: On the older properties. Because they can't reach them.

SN: That's amazing isn't it.

KB: Because when you look at a Victorian property...

SN: They're so high

KB: These are low (*points to ceiling*) some we've gone to are 20, 25 foot tall in hallways and things. And you just c...it doesn't look right. You can't stick it on a nice lovely Victorian property, and then you stick on these white things. A lot of the bigger ones now are putting in tiny little sensors in the ceiling, with a little red light, painted white.

SN: And you can get the water ones as well can't you? They're quite small.

KB: But they're all electronically controlled, which means then they have to come and put all the wiring in. But if they're doing a new build or a renovation site on the construction bit, all that goes in because it has to comply with current building regulations. And obviously if it's used as offices and things then all that has to be in place.

SN: One other question, do you, have you ever done any work for the National Trust?

KB: No. Ceri used to work for them.

SN: Oh did she? That's interesting.

KB: Mmm, at York.

SN: Oh really in Tan...

KB: Tadcaster...is it Tadcaster Road?

SN: Yeah.

KB: She worked for the buildings department there.

SN: Really? How long ago did she leave?

KB: About five years ago.

SN: Oh, I know a guy called Derrick Hodgson who works....

KB: You'd have to speak to...I don't...no that's Ceri's department.

SN: Ok.

KB: I'm sure she did her a degree in listed buildings and that sort of stuff. And heritage side.

SN: Oh I didn't realise. Ok..is that what made you both interested in you know this, taking on the house and...

KB: No, well we both like old properties, but we didn't realise this would be such a big project. Cos it looked fairly sound, but then again when you move into a property...

SN: You don't know what's behind there do you.

KB: Until you look into it or start lifting floorboards or fall through them, then you're not knowing what you're gonna find. We fell in love with the size of the house at the end of the day and the look of it from the front. And we've got a 120 foot garden out the back believe it or not.

SN: Really?

KL: Goodness.

KB: And they're not gonna build out there. There's an old peoples home at the bottom of the garden, which you get into through Princess Close, and that's a daycare centre, so at the moment there's no plans to get rid of it, so we're never gonna be backed on up there.

SN: And you've got a lovely view at the front haven't you, over the park.

KL: Now they've taken out...where the gap is over the road...there used to be an old dilapidated building. It was there...well it was there when we moved in eight years ago. It got rats in, the kids...the kids...cos it was an old working garage, the old gentleman had died and left it in his will to his family, and then his family started arguing over who was gonna have it. But you can't build on it cos its got subsidence and the far corner collapsed.

SN: Right.

KB: So it went on and it went on, so everyone in the street put a petition together to the council and said 'look, can we have a compulsory demolition order put on it, because it's dangerous. We're getting kids in the summertime scooting through the doors, there was rats and mice and allsorts in there, pigeons were getting in through the top. It was just a mess, and anyone that come down the street used to just stop and just...and look at the rest of the houses, and think 'oh there all gonna fall that way'. So they demolished it and it's been lovely ever since. Whether or not their gonna build on there...there was planning permission to put to houses on there...

SN: Oh really

KB: But they've had four drilling companies out and they've drilled down, I think 10m they got, and there was still no foundations. They were bringing up gravel and water.

KL: Oh right.

KB: It's where the gypsum fault runs through Ripon from the old cattle market, through there, down the middle of the road, and where they've got the new houses on the end used to be a vets. It runs straight through there and up into the street 'round the back. Cos two of the houses 'round there have already fell down and they've only been built 15 years.

KL: Goodness.

SN: Gosh.

KB: But the new ones they've built at the end, the three of them, there was 32 pylons had to go in to support the ground to put the houses on. But there is plans to build about 120 houses on that green field over there.

SN: Really?

KB: Yeah. Cos with the sustainable housing from the Government, they've got to have so many houses built within a certain area and that was one of the sites to put in about 120. But it's on a slope and it's a water table in the bottom of it, so they'll never be able to stabilise that amount of property, cos they've had the drillers out there as well. We've had up to ten companies coming just three and four days at a time, just drilling down and drilling down and drilling down.

SN: And no-one gets any other results...

KB: No-one gets anything through. No it's quite strange. You'd think if they did a drilling project they'd make a certificate and say 'right, we've drilled here, here, here'. Sell it to the Council and then they'd go and buy that off them instead of spending thousands of pounds bringing another drilling company in to drill 20, 30 pilot hole. And it's not cheap to drill, to put a drill in the ground for two, three weeks at a time. But, I don't know, obviously someone's got some money to waste.

SN: Jus...my final q...what's your question (to KL)?

KL: I was just going to ask one more thing. You've got a nice website, is that sort of fairly new that you've developed that? Is it sort of bringing a lot of work in or...?

KB: We keep upgrading...it tends to bring a lot of work in from further afield. We get a lot from London, a lot from Edinburgh, Scotland based, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man.

KL: Goodness. So is that actually helpful, or is it becoming sort of quite a problem then? Having to go back and...?

KB: No the thing is, when you google, we're right at the top. On sash...

SN: What, when you put in sash windows?

KB: Yeah, which is a good thing. Because we still generate a lot of work through it, and it's a very good website. And it's upgraded, obviously we paid for a private company to do the tweaking of it. But the logo and everything else we set up with another company as well, so.

KL: So although it's bringing all that in, which presumably you have to say 'no, sorry, we can't'.

KB: Mmm, no we don't

KL: It's also bringing in, you know, lots of more local...

KB: We actually advertise in a lot of the local, on your doorstep magazines, with the three different areas. And that generates a lot, especially from the small, little outlying villages and things. We were advertising in Yellow Pages, but Yellow Pages covers were from Middlesbrough and Newcastle, all over the place. And it's not... basically we'll sack the Yellow Pages side of it and concentrate on the website and the local advertising. Cos we only cover 100 miles. The Yellow Pages, we were getting umpteen calls from all over the place. We got a lot from the centre of Newcastle, which I'm from up that way, I know the area, but the timeframe it takes us to get into Newcastle and try and park in the middle of Newcastle... it's a nightmare. There's a lot of lovely properties there that we would do, do windows for, but... I don't know any specialist companies in Newcastle either.

SN: Really?

KB: Yeah... so... a good thing would be to have a local, each council had a local list of specialist tradesmen to work on listed buildings, I know they have the heritage side. But that's basically one company.

SN: What, do you mean project book?

KB: Yeah (*unsure*)

KL: Did you have one final question (*to SN*)

SN: Yeah, I was just gonna say, do you enjoy it? You really, really like it don't you?

KB: Yeah, yeah.

SN: So it's like a motivating job and everything?

KB: It's satisfying at the end of the day. When you go into an old property and you look at the state of the window, and then two, three days later it looks like a brand new window, it's the customer's like 'right, that's good'.

(*Phone rings*)

SN: We're nearly done.

KB: But nah, it's job satisfaction at the end of the day. And it's something completely different from what I was doing in the army so... and I did 22 years in the army so I wanted a change. This is more relaxing.

Clive Burton, Firm03SM. November 8th 2011

SN: So erm it's November the 8th, Tuesday November the 8th. Sophie Norton and Kim Loader with Clive Burton at Firm03SM stone masons in Dacre, York. Erm, just want to describe to you a little bit about what my kind of specific interest's in because (to KL) Clive and I haven't met before either.

KL: Right

SN: We've kind of dealt with each other by e-mail...

CB: Email and various things about training and various issues.

SN: But no we've never met.

CB: We've never met.

SN: So I work at the University and I'm interested...in the archaeology department with conservation studies erm and I'm interested in err conservation and craftsmanship and how kind of craft companies fit into the, you know, wider conservation sector. People like English Heritage and Local Authorities and stuff like that. And err Kim and I are working together because Kim is also interested in the public sector and interested particularly in the way that SMEs relate to the public sector, so that's, you know, small companies and so we're kind of here to find out a more about the specific err group of the public sector...craft, small building craft companies and how they, you know, relate and engage with the public sector. But first of all erm because I'm kind of interested in training and how people refine skill in craft companies, I wanted to ask you a little bit about your background.

CB: Right.

SN: And how you came to be where you are...

(Phone rings)

CB: Yeah, me. Well I'm 57. And I started, I'd been to school and I'd done GCSEs. No, CSEs and O levels as it was then. And A levels erm and I didn't particularly good A level grades, I thought I'll get a job. And I happened to be going through Lincoln and went to the cathedral and there was this really interesting exhibition about the various crafts that they use for restoring the cathedral. [*Looked at the stone masons*] and thought 'I could do that'. So I managed to find myself an apprenticeship erm with a company down in err a place called Great Bedwin, which is near Marlborough in Wiltshire.

SN: Ok.

CB: Delightfully styled monumental and ecclesiastical masonry contractors. And that was basically what we did. When the weather was bad we'd be inside knocking out letters on headstones, and when the weather was sunny we'd be outside mending churches. For this very idiosyncratic old boy who's family had had the business for 7 generations.

SN: Really?

CB: So I stayed with him for about 7 years and did various interesting things. And then I moved to work for a division of Mowlem's, one of the big national contracting companies as was. They're no longer in existence. They were bought out by a company called Carillion, so. And that was to run a masonry division that they were setting up in Bath. Or Bath, as we would say. And err...

(Muffled laughter)

SN: I say Bath.

KL: I say Bath.

CB: That's right, I say Bath as well. And that was quite exciting because we had, you know, we had to set up a workshop and get equipment and saws and, you know, all cranes and things, and establish a team of guys. And erm this was eventually where this chap came from that I was telling you about who's the, who runs the CAD drafting company, because he came to work for me as draughtsman. You know doing all the setting out and preparing all the stone schedules and things like that. So it was basically, it was a sort of miniature production company. We had about 15 guys working for us. You know, sawyers and machinists and banker masons, and then we had a load a guys out on site doing all the fixing. Erm, but due to various machinations within the Mowlem empire, erm at one stage they decided that they wanted to amalgamate all the various bits of Mowlem's that were doing stone restoration into 1 grouping. And I ended up in what I felt was not exactly the best place for me to be, so I erm lit out of there and went to work in London for Beeston's who were part of Mowlem's, and had been for years and years and years, and they had had the contract for the restoration of Westminster Abbey since, you know, I don't know, 15 years ago, and the guy who was in charge, the director, I knew him anyway from previous work, erm and he said he wanted a project manager for Westminster Abbey. So I went to work there for 3 years, which was quite interesting.

KL: Mmm.

SN: I bet.

CB: Yeah it was because we had about 60, we had about 60 people on site, because it was, you know, it was a full team of people. And we had, you know, plasterers and carpenters and 6 or 7 scaffolders at any one time, because they're always taking the scaffolding down and putting it back up again. It was just like, you know, well, dare I say it, it was probably slightly bigger than York Minster. When I was in its heyday. Because there was a lot of money available, a lot of push to get in on and get it done and get it finished. And it was, obviously given its location, they didn't want to have the whole thing shrouded in scaffolding for years and years and years.

SN: No.

CB: Agh, but then after about 3 years of working in London the opportunity came to takeover the running of the regional office that Beeston's had in York. Erm, prior to that we'd hatched a plan where I was going to set up an office on Oxford for Beeston, but because of, again, political machinations within Mowlem's, that didn't work. And instead of heading to the west I had to head to the north, to the land of sugar beat and erm , mist and snow and things like that.

SN: Snow!

CB: But it is very dry.

SN: Yes it is dry in the east.

CB: It's a lot drier hear than it was down in Bath.

SN: Oh really?

CB: Oh yes, yes. It's very wet in the West Country.

SN: We...completely aside, we walked the Cotswold Way this year in May and we had completely beautiful weather the whole time.

CB: Yes, yes.

KL: Well I did the Two Moors Way in Devon and we had to give up because it was just so waterlogged! We got soaked.

SN: Really?

CB: May, I think May is a good month wherever you go.

KL: Yes this was August, completely the wrong month.

CB: That's right.

SN: May and September I think for walking.

CB: Yes. Erm, so that was what happened. So I was working sort of two days a week on Westminster Abbey and 2 days a week in Yorkshire and, you know, one day off travelling backwards and forwards basically. And then Geoff joined us in October '89 and, yeah, and for a while, things weren't too bad. But come the, cos previous to that the building trade had gone cyclically through various, you know, swings and roundabouts, uplifts and downturns, and it was always, you know, up and down and up and down and up and down. And one of the, we had a bit of an up in '91, '92 and by '93, '94 it was going down erm and in '95 Mowlem's went right through their whole group of companies and decided that they had far too many bits and pieces hanging out in various parts of the world that weren't making enough money. And we were one of them, so. The choice was either to go back to work in Cambridge for Beeston's, which I didn't particularly want to, cos I had a young family by then. And Geoff didn't want to cos he had young family and all his roots up here. So we erm by the time it actually happened there was nothing to take over in terms of contracts, so we basically finished as Beeston on the Friday and put the new sign up on the Monday morning, you know, to say Firm03SM. So that was March 1995, so we've been battling on ever since.

KL: So it's just the York branch that they closed then? The Beeston.

CB: Err, yeah well the whole thing.

KL: You say you could've gone back down to Cambridge, they were still being...

CB: Yes, I could've gone back to Cambridge. There was still, oh yeah there was still a lot of work there. Then.

KL: Right. So it's...

SN: Is it still going? I thought the Cambridge office was still going.

CB: No, it folded about a couple of months ago.

KL: Oh right, recently.

CB: Various things happened. They got sold, they were shut by Mowlem's, sold out, split, bought by various people, sold, bought, sold.

KL: Goodness.

CB: And now, you know, someone has, you know, someone's bought Beeston's and then the parent company that bought them has gone bust and they've reinvented themselves as, you know, 2011 Ltd or whatever it is. And with a management buy out and I'm not sure what's happened to the bits of Beeston.

SN: Right.

CB: But I don't think it's erm, and erm obviously the director that I used to work for, he's, you know, long retired. As are most the people that I used to know.

SN: Yeah. What a shame. I always get worried with companies like that, things like their archive, what happens to their archive?

CB: Mmm. Well obviously Kett, well both of them, had tremendous craft and art experience, erm, I think Kett did a lot of the carving for Grinling Gibbons on Westminster Abbey, no the Houses of Parliament, when it was built.

SN: Really?

CB: So, massive archive, but I would think a lot of that would've been dispersed or saved a good 10 or 15 years ago.

SN: Oh, ok.

CB: I mean if you're interested, I do have a phone number for Vic Franklin who was my director then. Who's still, I think he's still alive and still living in Cambridge. I've got a phone number for him somewhere.

SN: Yeah, that would be interesting, later on.

CB: Yeah, just to ask the question.

SN: Just to find out where it is, because things like that can be really interesting.

CB: And obviously from an oral point he would have a wealth of history from his time at Beeston's, because he'd, I think he'd been there man and boy. For 30, 40 years or something you see. When it was really, when they were really going strong in the sort of 60s and 70s, and doing a lot of restoration on colleges and, you know, it was virtually continual, you know, it was virtually continual work for them.

SN: Right...

CB: And the Westminster Abbey project was..erm...was on a cost plus basis, so there was no competition involved. It was purely you know, do the work, they scrutinize the accounts and you get paid for what you've done plus a percentage to cover overheads and profit.

SN: Similar way to an architect gets paid, isn't it?

CB: Yes. Sometimes, yes, yes. But you see, all this sort of thing has changed, you know, because money is so tight, particularly at the moment. But in the past five years those sort of contracts have become fewer and fewer because people have realised that, you know, maybe sometimes they don't get the right kind of value. And then obviously with local authorities you've got this daft thing with, you know, where they say 'oh we've got to go for best value', erm which basically means cheapest price.

KL: Whatever that means

CB: Yes, means cheapest price. And then they'll justify...

KL: Sounds good.

CB: ...justify all the extras because that can come out of another budget and, you know, everyone looks happy at the end of the day. And it's all just accounting and fudging figures. That's how we see it anyway. So they don't actually get best value at all.

SN: No, they get cheapest.

CB: It looks cheap. On paper and when, when you go down and have a look a few month later, it looks cheap when you look at the building, so. What can you do? Anyway, I'm not bitter (laughs).

SN: Erm, and then, fast forward to the future, how about the other gu...cos it's...how many people work for you now?

CB: We've got seven, seven guys plus me and Geoff. Yeh.

SN: And are they...what sort of ages are they?

CB: They vary between 18 and 45.

SN: OK. And are they, are they, do they all have erm...do you think there's a typical way that got into, to working here?

CB: No, this is quite interesting, this is one of the...cos historically we've had quite a few unfortunate problems with trainees. Erm, you know young lads that start, you interview them, they seem fine, they're all enthusiastic, errr. And they last, you know, three or four months, and they realise that they don't actually like being out in the cold and the wet. You know, if you start them off in August or something like that, by January, they don't want to know. And then we've had erm one lad who was a bit more mature...he'd done his a levels, very keen, wanted to, to make a career in stone masonry. He lasted about two weeks. Realised that it wasn't really what he wanted. I think it was, you know, too dirty and dusty, you know.

SN: Was that a long time ago?

CB: That was about five or six years ago. Err we had another lad we took on. We said 'right, we'll go for more mature people now' and if you can get them in just before they're too old for the CITB funding then, which I think is 25 or something.

SN: Oh is it?

CB: Yeah, I might be...I'd have to check on that. So, this guy was about 23, 24. You know, keen, not exactly academic, but keen and willing and, you know, made all the right noises. Erm, and he lasted about 20 months.

SN: Really?

CB: Until he was just about to finish his college course, and then he, he packed it in. But we've now successfully trained two apprentices, one of whom is Geoff's son. Erm, and another lad and they're both fairly mat..they were both fairly mature people when they came.

SN: Ok

CB: They were both either 24 or 25. One of them had got a good academic background and his, his choice as he explained it to me was either possibly to go to university and do engineering, electrical engineering or something like that. Um or, you know, to get a trade background. He's got, you know, he's got good academic qualifications, bright lad, and he's very, very capable in terms of his, you know practical skills. Erm, better in the workshop than maybe out

on site, because he sort of sees things...you know, he sees things in three dimensions maybe better than some of the others. That's Jez. And then Eric erm he's a similar sort of age. Erm, he'd done various things before, er, sort of..he came to work for us really because he'd lost his job and didn't have anything to do. And his dad said you know 'you can't be sitting around all day, so get in that van, get down to Nostell Priory, we've got 300 yards of brick wall to repaint'. And you know we thought 'well maybe, you know, give him a few months', cos this was august again, or July, you know, come September, October, we'll see. And he stuck at it through the winter and he stuck at it all the way through until the following September when he started at college. And you know, so he's done his apprenticeship. So we actually had two of them going through college in tandem, which was unprecedented.

SN: Oh really

CB: But it is good because, you know, at least you can see, erm, you know we were quite heartened, you know, they'd done really well, excelled at college, from what their tutors have said and the marks that they've got. And they're a couple of really good lads, they're keen and enthusiastic, and at the moment, they, you know, don't show any sign of wanting to leave and go and work for anyone else, which is always the big fear.

SN: Yeh.

CB: I mean that's the one benefit of being in a recession at the moment, is that there aren't that many jobs around. You know, you might have seen in the press that that firm in Lichfield, Linfords...

SN: Yeh, you told me about...

CB: Linford's went bust. We've had e-mails from the Stone Federation asking if there's anyway we could take over any of their apprentices because they've got 5 or 6 apprentices, you know, part trained. That are obviously, you know, left high and dry. But erm...you know, Linford's had something like 250 men on their books.

SN: That many?

CB: Oh yeah, I don't think...Firm16GB's...have you been talking to Firm16GB's?

SN: I know Ian...but they're a bit shrouded in mystery for me at the minute, Firm16GB's. But I think they've reduced their staff, haven't they, down? At the beginning of last year.

CB: I wouldn't be at all surprised.

SN: I think they've gone down to less than 100 people.

CB: Right, yes.

SN: I think that's the difference. Maybe that's why they've managed to survive.

CB: Maybe.

SN: I think Firm15SM did the same thing, cos Firm15SM are another company that are on that size, aren't they? CB: Mmm

SN: And I think they cut down quite a lot at the beginning of last year as well. But it's all rumour with Firm16GB's I can never get to the bottom of things.

CB: No. We used to have quite a...not a good relationship...we used to have a pleasant, cordial relationship with erm Jeremy Bott, who's now the managing director. When he was the estimator, cos we used to swap, you know, are you

keen on this, you know, what are you thinking about that one. Have you priced that one? Have you got this one? You know...erm, but since he's become MD we haven't really, you know, had much to do with him. But they grew incredibly, you know they grew very big very quickly, and I think they probably realised they had to shrink quite quickly.

SN: Oh really.

CB: I don't know. If you know Ian, I'm not sure what Ian Clifford's position is with them now.

SN: So, it's an interesting one...But I'd really like to talk to Jeremy I've just never had the opportunity.

CB: Mmmm. Not sure. I mean can't remember Jez or Eric saying...I think Firm16GB's did have an apprentice in the college with them when they were there.

SN: Oh really... Do you think they supported each other? Jez and Eric. You know the fact that were going through together.

CB: No. Mmmm...sometimes. I think, well yeah, I think obviously it would help because they could collaborate on various things and certainly when it comes to getting evidence and getting all your portfolio marked up and signed. You know it was good to have someone to support them. And what we tried to do was to give them projects that they could work on by themselves but together So that they could do the setting out together and they did this really nice window on a church at Skidby near Hull. And...

(Distraction as someone enters).

CB: It was nice because it was a sort of microcosm of a big job and it was just a fairly simple window. Two mullions, two sets of jambs, bit of tracery. Um, and we measured it all up, got the stones, got the source stone cut so it was ready in blank form, erm, got the scaffold up, took the window out, erm, copied all the stones. They'd laid it all out on the floor in the workshop. Made the templates, made it fit, and obviously, the church, over a period of years, the wall had sort of tipped and moved a bit, so we had to bend the new stonework to kind of fit the opening so it didn't have, end up with, massive great joints everywhere. So they did all that and then they worked it all and then we left them to fix it.

SN: Ok.

CB: Which was, you know, bit of a steep learning curve for them. But it's the only way that really you're gonna learn. Particularly that sort of work. Erm, and so. Yes, they would have to collaborate on that. You know, we forced them to collaborate on that. Yeah, they, I wouldn't say that they're dependant on each for their, during their training. I mean it was very useful to have the Skidby job because at the same time we were putting them through for their CSCS heritage cards, which they needed. And, I forget the name of the guy from the college, I think it's one of the retired lecturers.

SN: Bill Bassett?

CB: Bill. So Bill was doing that, so that was great. So he could go down to Skidby and, you know, literally spend a day there going through various things. But it was, it was wonderful because, um you know, they'd basically done

everything themselves, um, very little help or prompting from Geoff or I and maybe a little bit of help from one of the other masons about various things. But they had, you know, they had to answer all the questions and they had to, you know, show him all the evidence of what they were doing. So, um, yeah it was an interesting little project. So we tried to do that with them, because they're mature. You know, you can't treat them, you know..

SN: No, they're no 18 year olds are they?

CB: No, you've got to give them some responsibility and you've got to, you know, we said, you know 'we'll throw you in at the deep end and see what you can do. If you start to struggle all you've got to do is shout'. And luckily, you know, odd times they would. They'd say 'oh you know, we're worried about this, not sure what to do about that, you know, can't think how can we get this one in?' But, you know, we can overcome it.

SN: It's interesting what you said about funding and people being just before they're 25. Is there any restriction on people having prior qualifications? Because I thought you couldn't get funding if you had a degree as well.

CB: You may well be right. These two had only ever done either a levels or GCSEs.

SN: I think it's even gone down now to one A level. So you can only have done one a level to qualify for funding. But I'd have to check that. But it's quite restrictive and it's interesting, the way it implicates you when you're taking on somebody. You can't always pick the best person for the job. I mean you did in that instance, but if you'd had to interview, if you were interviewing people and you had, like 15 applications, and some of them had a degree and some of them didn't, you would...

CB: I must admit I wasn't aware of that Sophie and I think that's something we need to check with the training people at the CITB again. Because obviously if they're or have changed the rules, we're not thinking about taking anyone on at the moment, but certainly in... What we'd really like to do would be to start looking for someone to join us in, say March next year.

SN: Oh really.

CB: So we can employ them from March until September and then the contract ceases and the apprenticeship is a new training contract. It's a completely new contract.

KL: And that starts September.

CB: So that starts September, when the college starts you see. So you could...this is what we did with Ian, we took him on in February and said 'ok' you know...

SN: Probation?

CB: Yeah. You know, you've heard me talking about things, I've heard what you've got to say, the only way we're gonna find out whether we're really gonna end up fond of each other is for you to start work and see what you're like'. Obviously, you know within a couple of hours, whether they're any good or not. With him, and obviously with Eric it was the same, you see straight away that they've got som...if they've got it about them, then you know. Usually. But it's the best way to see, and then it gives them a chance to see the sort of work that you do and... It's all very well sitting in an interview but you've actually got to see what it's like when you go out on site and...start clambering up and down the scaffolding and getting covered in muck and rubbish, banging your fingers and scraping you knuckles.

SN: Yeah. Ok. So shall we move on now to, like, winning work? It's quite interesting that you're still growing in the recession. Because you must be growing to take on an apprentice...is that right?

CB: Err...well, the thing is it's the only...it's not so much growing...it's sort of maintaining...sort of stabilising and maintaining your position.

SN: Ok.

CB: You know we can either take on an apprentice, or if we need extra labour we've got to take on extra labour. But the kind of labour that we take on, you've got to invest a fair amount of time and trouble in training them. So if you're gonna do that you might as well take on an apprentice and you know, ok you might have to use them as kind of cheap labour to start with, while they're training, but at least you get, at you're gonna get something out of them in three or four years time. Um, I would say we're growing. I mean we're just about holding our own in terms of turnover and you know the way the business is performing. Because it is a very nasty market out there. For work. Erm, certainly is.

SN: Would you say the majority of the work is private clients or is it public sector funded or...

CB: At the moment probably about (pause) 50 50 private clients and work on churches that's funded through the HLF.

SN: And English Heritage...

CB: Yes.

KL: Heritage Lottery...

CB: Heritage Lottery Fund. Yes. So that basically is English Her...I'm not sure what percentage of English Heritage money there is now. I think most of it is...most of the church work that we're doing is Lottery funded.

SN: Is it?

CB: Uh huh

SN: I know that English Heritage have had their grants cut really substantially so,...

CB: We've got one job at the moment that we're just completing that's part funded by North York Moors National Parks. They had a £10,000...it was a £40,000 contract, they had a 25% grant for that. And the job has grown exponentially to be honest and the client is funding the difference. Cos the North York Moors grant was a one off...

SN: Right

CB: ...payment. It wasn't really relevant to erm the size of the project, it was just what they were prepared to pay. Erm.

SN: It worked fairly well in that case, didn't it? The intervention?

CB: Mmmm.

SN: So in those cases you're always contracting directly with the client, and the client just deals with the funder themselves, don't they?

CB: Yes.

SN: So do you ever work directly for...but you do have to tender in those instances?

CB: Oh yes, yeah.

SN: And does it tend to be other companies that are like a similar size, that are tendering against you?

CB: It depends. Sometimes they can be bigger, sometimes they can be smaller. What we're finding at the moment is that even fairly large contracts up to quarter of a million pounds in value, you're actually tendering against companies that are a lot smaller, who may only have erm, one or two employees and very little in the way of overheads, if any overheads at all. So that does..you know that makes it very tricky.

SN: Right, ok.

KL: But is it...I mean is it realistic for them to go for those sorts of projects?

CB: Ah well. That's a different matter isn't it? Because then in terms of quality, health and safety, performance, erm, etc, etc, erm we would say, obviously from our point of view, that it's not. Err and they would say oh, 'well', you know, 'we can cope, we can dot it, we can subcontract out the bits and pieces that we can't do ourselves'. But you know if they're only doing one job at a time, then they can cope with it. But, erm...

KL: I mean, it's just quite interesting, you know, sort of, I'm coming in thinking of you as being, you know, sort of very small...with nine of you...

CB: Yes, we are. That's what we think of.

KL: But then making that contrast with the sort of one and two size. As opposed to, I was sort of thinking you might be comparing yourself against the bigger companies...

CB: Well they probably...if you go and talk to the bigger companies they'll probably say well, you know, 'it's people like Firm03SM who, you know, have only got a small office and a small workshop, and, you know, haven't got a massive amount of overhead, erm, they're the ones that we suffer against'.

KL: So it really is similar issues but all the way up the spectrum really..?

CB: Mmm, I expect the one man and his, you know, the guy that maybe, you know, his wife does the books and he's got him and his brother and his son or something working for them. They complain about the guy who's literally just working out of a transit van and erm does his bookwork when he can and picks up people in the pub the night before he needs some extra labour to, you know, take a wall down or something like that. And then, you know, they'll take extra labour as and when it's needed, you know on a daily basis.

KL: So on the whole, I mean, if you're tendering then, do you get asked for things like erm health and safety policies, insurance, and all this kind of stuff would be a feature?

CB: Oh definitely, yes.

KL: Which you're ok with? Something that you're happy to do?

CB: Yes, yeah. I mean particularly for some of the local authority work we do and some of the more complicated jobs. I mean we've done work for Wakefield Council, erm, for their highways and bridges section. Well obviously you know, you can imagine the rigmarole, you have satisfying the health and safety criteria with that: method statements, risk assessments, everything has got to be erm properly done. Now obviously for smaller companies, they may not bother to tender for that, they may not worry about that sort of thing...

SN: The individuals...

CB: Yeah, cos it's just not worth the hassle. But for us obviously that's where we think that we have a bit of an edge, because we can provide all that kind of back up information that's necessary and still, because of the size of the company, we can still be fairly competitive. It's not as if you've, you know, got Morrison's, or someone like that, to price putting a few stones on a parapet wall, which, ok, you know would probably they would do, but not as effectively as we would.

KL: And have you got these sort of things that you can just pull of the shelf? Or do you have to really adjust them for each job that you go for?

CB: The...ah...the health and safety policy, that basically comes off the shelf. That gets reviewed on an annual basis. The risk assessments, we tend to write those specifically for each job, because we get very annoyed with people that send us, sort of 120-page generic risk assessment for £5,000 worth of, you know, lead roofing. You know, all you want is two sides of A4 and a sketch maybe that says, you know, exactly what's going to happen. So I tend to write, if we have a method statement or we need a, you know, a risk assessment, a method statement, I'll sit down and write those myself and they are very...very job specific. Ok you know, they'll be bits...the computer...you can cut and paste a few bits and pieces, but very often they're so specific to particular projects that you have to sit down and write them all. But, you see, Geoff and I take the view that erm you've kind of done all that when you put the tender together anyway, because you'll be thinking in the back of your mind. You go...like I went to a church yesterday down in Sprotborough and you're looking and thinking, 'ok well so, if we put the scaffold there and do that, and we put the polythene on that, and we some...we do this, then we can get up, we get all that down, we get all the dust out the way, we're gonna have a rubbish chute on there, we'll put the skip here, and', you know...it, it...I don't know how you can price jobs like that without thinking about all the hea...without thinking about the health and safety, the risk, the dust, the interface with the general public...you know, all the, all the things that can happen. Erm, you know, I don't know how people can do it.

KL: So, in that sense it sounds like it's not really a huge extra burden to you. Obviously you need to physically write it...

CB: Yeah, you've got to sit down and physically write it but for

KL: ...but you've gone through that process.

CB: Yeah, I mean the only time it doesn't work like that is if say, you have a project where you start out with the best intentions to do x and then you take the roof off and you find that in fact it's y and then you've got to start all over again. And if you've got, erm, a CDM plan, or somebody that's looking after the CDM from the client's point of view, then obviously you need to keep them on side and you need to demonstrate to them that you've actually thought about all the, you know, added risks and the change that there is. But if you read all the bumf about erm writing health and safety plans, it's supposed to be a living document anyway. It's not something that you just do and then, you know, 'oh, there it is, it's on the shelf', you know. It's supposed to be moving on all the time. So every time something...you know, you could take it to the nth degree...every time something changes you put something else in.
(muttering)

CB: Yeah, you know, you're using different kind of screws, or have a little tool box talk, or tell them how the different kind of screws work...and you know, not to trip over the box and...

(laughter)

CB: No, as daft as it may sound...

KL: Sorry...

CB: No that is the kind of thing that um, you have to be able to demonstrate that you've thought about all these issues...err, you know, what's happening. So, yeah.

KL: What about insurance? I mean, is that something that would vary from job to job...insurance requirements?

CB: We...er...insurance requirements can...for us can vary from job to job because we have an insurance policy that's governed to a certain height limit. So if we're working above a certain height, so above 12metres, then we would have to notify our insurers. And there may...for us, there be an additional premium to pay, but otherwise, erm, no we have sort of standard £5million cover for erm public liability and employers liability and all the rest of it, which is the norm for most projects. Err, you know. We've got a couple there from Villers the architects in York. You know Martin Villers?

SN: I know of him, I don't know..

CB: Yeah, yeah. Well we've done a couple of work...that's the church at Strensall that Geoff's working on.

SN: Ok

CB: That's a Wiles and Macquire contract. Erm, and so they'll for, you kow, they'll ask for a certain amount of insurance cover, public liability, err, and you know, any other kind of insurance that they may want, you know, you to have covered. And so we do that through our brokers erm if we need any extra cover... I mean say err anything exciting, like, you know, bridges...obviously they're very excited about a bridge, erm we did Ferry Bridge, old bridge, a couple of years ago for Wakefield Council. That's before they rebuilt the A1...

SN: Right

CB: You used to go over the A1...over the bridge on the A1...and you looked down to one side and there was the old bridge.

SN: Right yeah

CB: That wasn't used...it was that one. But it's a navigable waterway. So you've got British Waterways going underneath...

KL: Right

KB: Soo, and they want to know that you've got insurance in case anything falls off and goes through one of their boats, because then they'll be sued by the boat owner. So yeah that was quite exciting, we had, got the broker in...you know, just to...and he went back to the insurance company and they said 'fine' you know 'you've told us, that's it, there's no extra cost' but, you know, obviously, you know, need to know. Umm. So whether your one man band type people have got that level of insurance cover or the ability to vary it, change it and notify people, one questions. Cos you can get, you know, employers liability insurance off the internet for £50 or something like that.

Whether it's actually worth the...if you ever get a certificate...whether it's worth the paper it's written on...but, our, insurance is a major cost to us. Our premiums are, I won't divulge how much they are, but it's not cheap. So you have to put...so each job we'll put, depending on the duration, type of work, and the value, then, erm, we'll put a percentage in to cover our insurance premium. And that'll be driven by...you know, basically we set a...we set a turnover figure with the insurance company at the start of the insurance year, so then, you know, if you say 'well, we're gonna turnover 500,000' and they say 'ok, your premium's gonna be x' then you know, if you do £100,000's worth of work, you're looking for 20% of the (*muttering*) premium. And it's as simple as that.

KL: Right, yes.

CB: So that, when you present your price specification, that's one, you know, one of the big items that they see straight away. Insurance. But that's how much it costs. It is. It's a lot of money these day.

SN: Right.

KL: It's something that's cropped up that I've seen quite a lot, you know, the cost of the insurance seems to be making quite a difference to some companies. Whether they'll go for certain jobs. Not in your field, but just more generally...it seems to be quite a crucial kind of factor.

CB: Yeah, I think if we did err fairly low level general housing type work on fairly inexpensive properties, not being rude about people who own normal houses, it's a lot different from working on, you know, churches, grade I listed buildings, you know, places that are erm need a lot o, you know, need a lot of money to put them back together again. So, yeah it is a...it's a constant burden.

KL: Are you...you mentioned Wakefield Council...have you done much other work for local authorities?

CB: Erm, we've worked for Calderdale, Kirklees, ahhh, Wakefield, don't think we've done for York for years and years and years. Errm, we did a bit for Middlesbrough two years ago, ah we've got one in at the moment to price for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

KL: Oh, yeah, yeah.

CB: Erm the old...you might know it, if you're (*mutters*) up that way. St George's theatre in the middle of Stockton-on-Tees?

KL: I don't know that, I probably know Middlesbrough better.

CB: Oh right...

KL: Were you involved somewhere down by the station...the railway station? I know they had a big job and they were looking for sort of heritage type work...round there.

CB: Oh. Well you see, they're a bit nasty because they actually said they wanted to charge you some, quite a hefty fee, to go on their approved list. And we told them...

KL: That's Middlesborough? Oh right.

CB: We told them where to stick it. We did a building for them not far from the station which was the...archive library (pause). Strange old building, by the side of the flyover.

KL: Yes, I mean, I'll know...

CB: Big, big, big, tall, big tall, it had bits...it had scaffold on it for years. Bits falling off and um, that was a few years ago. And I think we priced to do a lot of work on the town hall, which I think Firm16GB's did in the end.

KL: Oh right.

CB: Ah, but then the last few times that we've um, you know, when it's come out to reapply to go on their list, ah, they want some...£150, £200 or something. To go on their approved list.

SN: Really?

CB: So we said, you know, given that our sort of track record at getting jobs out of them, we decided not to bother. Just didn't seem worth it. For the sort of work that they were doing.

KL: Are they the only ones really that you've come across that have asked for a fee?

CB: Mmm. Yeh, we've done work down in Grimsby erm for err Northeast Lincs council and that was, you know, that was fine. Done a bit of work for Hull City, a few years ago, erm.

SN: Have you done anything for Harrogate? Harrogate.

CB: No, no.

KL: North Yorkshire? Or would it be North Yorkshire? Or would it be the Dis..?

SN: They've got a big highways department.

CB: Yeah, no, no. They tend um most their sort of bridges and monuments work is done through cos they have a term contract, with used to be Michell's, who is it now, someone else. Most of it's outsourced anyway now.

SN: Right.

CB: And they tend to have, you know, various selected contractors that do that. But to be honest, if you see the quality of the kind of work that they do, you know if they've got an old bridge that they need to restore, put back together again cos some farmer's knocked it with a trailer. We'd be wasting our time. It's just not worth the hassle.

SN: Really?

CB: Yeah, for the sort of quality of what they do.

KL: And most of this work that you've done for the council's have you erm sort of contracted directly with the council's rather than through a...another contractor?

CB: Yes, that's right. Directly through the council. Yeah.

KL: And, err, the sort of the scale of the contracts? Well have they varied quite a lot? I mean, you know... quite small contracts or...

CB: Nothing particularly big, anything between 10 and 150 thousand. Something like that. The one for Calderdale was quite...that was the peoples' park in Halifax a few years ago.

KL: Oh right.

CB: We put all the balusters and stonework and the steps and things back together. And, who was it, no it wasn't Firm16GB's, it was erm someone else. There was an orangery there that needed restoring, but we didn't get that one. That was Whitehead's of Oldham who've now gone bust and erm...

SN: So many companies...

CB: Yeah, well I think they closed down quite a few years ago.

SN: Right, I haven't heard of them.

KL: Would that be about the extent of how far you'd travel?

CB: Yes.

KL: You've mentioned Grimsby...

CB: Yes. Halifax, Huddersfield. We've done, we've done work on Huddersfield railway station for Kirklees, which is always interesting.

KL: Always interesting in...?

CB: Well it's an amazing building.

KL: The actual building, right.

CB: Have you seen the station?

KL: I've been through it a few times. But I was probably too young then to be taking much notice.

CB: The outside is absolutely wonderful. It's a very impressive classical pile. Obviously somebody came back from the grand tour and said 'ehh, yeah go on I think I'll 'ave one a those'.

KL: Laughs.

CB: And they did, and it's, you know, but Corinthian columns and massive capitals and pediments and you know, all sorts of fancy things. Brackets and folioles everywhere.

SN: Is it all local, kind of, York stone?

CB: Yes. Yes it is, very local. That was one of the problems, when we did one of the restorations, cos we've done a couple of jobs there. One of them with Beeston. And they'd actually used a local stone that's got a lot of mica platelet in it. You know, mica is a, it's a quartz mineral, but it comes in very, very thin plates. You can actually peel it off like cardboard.

SN: Oh really?

CB: It's sort of see through. It's fire proof. In the old days they used to use it for sort of making lenses and glasses for heat shields in foundries and things like that. Err.

SN: Right.

CB: In the old days they used to use it in erm old-fashioned coal stoves that had doors on them. Before you had those coal stoves with strips of glass to stop the heat getting out, they used to use little bits of mica in the doors, held in with asbestos cement (laughs). So there's lots of mica in the sandstone.

SN: Uh huh

CB: And obviously it creates fracture plates...

SN: Yeah...

CB: And so, all the fancy carvings, you know, big lumps, would just be falling off.

KL: Oh goodness.

CB: Yeah. Yeah, that was another one where they had scaffold up around the station for quite a few years while they got the money together to restore it.

SN: Where did you get the stone from to replace it? Did you try and match the stone?

CB: Well that was actually specified by Kirklees council. They'd got a geologist.

SN: Oh really?

CB: They'd got a geologist to do some petrographic analysis of the various stone on the building and various other stones that would match, you know, petrographically, chemically, physically, you know colour, etc etc. And they came up with one that didn't have all the mica in.

KL: Oh right yes, that's what I was wondering!

CB: Yes, so stone without mica and lots of bits of stainless steel. And it all went back again.

SN: Right. And if your stone isn't erm been specified by the council or the geologist or whoever, how do you go about sourcing it?

CB: Err, well, we have, you know, we have our own library. We have, you know, extensive knowledge of what's available and what would match with what. But very often, to protect ourselves, we would erm, possibly commission a geologist ourselves. To say, you know, 'this is what err this is what we want to use. Is it suitable?' Or 'this is what we're trying to match, is it suitable?'

SN: Right.

CB: I mean sometimes, not so prevalent now, but a few years ago, erm, they actually used to put in the schedule of works that, you know, you will take a sample of stone and send it to, you know, AN Other, for analysis. Erm, but for pricing purposes, base your price on, you know, whatever sort of stone. Now often they've actually done that themselves beforehand. English Heritage will insist that they actually do the matching and the sampling beforehand and then they'll say, you know, 'you are to use such and such a stone'.

SN: Right, ok.

CB: Erm, if it's a private client, you know, who doesn't really know what erm to use, or doesn't have an architect involved, then you know, probably just to cover ourselves, we'd say well 'we suggest we use this, but, you know, if you're prepared to pay for the analysis, we'll send it away and we'll get it properly matched and,' you know... Or if, they may say 'well, I'm not too bothered, I just want something that's pink'. Let's have some pink stone (laughs).

SN: Right.

CB: And there are places down in Derbyshire where you can get pink stone, so...

SN: Do you go all over the country...

CB: Not necessarily all over the country, but we go wherever we need to. I mean the Bath stone for the orangery at Sledmere erm came from err near Corsham, down in Wiltshire. You know, not that far from Bath.

SN: Right.

CB: Err and we sourced that from a local masonry company in Bath. And we sent them some samples and they sent us some samples. We took those to the architect and said 'look, you know, this is what's available, erm which

particular one do you want'? He ummed and ahed and he said 'well, you know, I think we'll use that one'. So that was it. So we said 'fine, thanks very much, that's what we'll order'.

SN: So, we're quite interested in the supply chain you see, so it's quite interesting to find out where, you know, how your operations might benefit other companies in the local area, if you know what I mean.

CB: Mmm.

SN: And, like, where you get your other materials from, like lime, your stainless steel cramps, err.

CB: That's privileged commercial information!

(Laughter)

SN: Ok.

CB: Well, no. You can't have my...I'm not going to tell you who my metal basher is! I happen to have, erm, from years back, a guy that runs a company who only make specialist stainless steel fixings for the building trade. So, if we need anything, more often than not, we go to him. Ok you've got to pay a bit in carriage, because it's not local, erm, but there's a few of them about. A lot of them are in Sheffield, there used to be quite a few in Sheffield, erm, but there are people about who do nothing but stainless steel building fixings. So it's much easier to go to them than say go to your local engineer and say 'can you make us some of these', and he says 'I haven't got of the bars I'll have to get the strip, and I'll have to get this guillotined, oh, you know, I'm not sure about the pressings or the stampings for this'. But these guys, you say 'can you make us 20 of them', send them a sketch, they'll be in the post in a couple of days time.

SN: Right ok. And what about things like lime mortar and stuff like that?

CB: We just buy it from wherever's cheapest. You know, depending on what they want and erm, you know, who's particular lime they want. We tend to use David Cartwright a lot. But a lot of the builders' merchants now are keeping, stocking lime. Particularly in Richardtown. All the builders merchants in Richardtown stock lime. Erm we occasionally use masons' mortars in Edinburgh, they're very good. Very helpful, for lime and all sorts of other things. Cartwright's very good for, you know, lime and stuff, paint, hair. All that sort of stuff. Err, there's so many of them about, you get, well not so much now, but you get bombarded with e-mails from people down in Devon wanting to sell you pallets of lime. It's just not gonna work, so. And there's, I think, is it Ryedale Conservation Supplies? But we've never bothered to deal with them, because I think we've had prices from them and, you know, it's just not worth it for what they charge.

SN: So it's generally the cheapest...

KL: And have you got a sort of local direct competitor? Or lots of competitors?

CB: Oh there are lots of competitors in York. Yes, yeah.

KL: Just because of it being York..?

CB: Yeah, because it's York, because the sort of cache...people have either trained at the Minster and left or they've, you know, they've moved here because, you know, there are a lot of masonry companies, so, yeah I could probably list you 5 or 6, you know, smallish companies, smaller than ours, erm, within a, you know, 10 mile radius. Quite easily. And then, you know, if you go further a field, you know, there are people, well up towards Middlesbrough, Darlington,

erm, round that sort of part of the world. Erm, if you go further north, erm, you know, round Bishop Auckland, and up round there, there'll be, you know, small masonry companies. If you get up a bit further, there's quite a few bigger masonry supply companies, who only, who would only do supply. They've got, they own the quarries, they'll produce. Err, so their not exa...we would buy from them, they're not exactly direct competitors to us. But, erm, they'll obviously be people around there who'll do all the fixing and obviously the further north, you get up into Durham and Newcastle, err, as you said, you mentioned Firm15SM. But there's also other people up there as well. And if you go across to the west, to Carlisle, erm, you know, there's people there that, erm, cos Laing's, who were a big contracting company, had a big masonry base in Carlisle, they were a big...

SN: Laing O'Rourke?

CB: Well that was before it became O'Rourke. This was when it was just Laing's, when it was Laing construction. And they were, they were good because they trained a lot, you know, it was a good old-fashioned masonry company. You know, they were well known, they were based in Carlisle. They'd been there for years and did big masonry contracts, erm, you know all up and down the north of England. A lot of work in Manchester, they'd even come over the York and...

SN: Really

CB: do various things. I think they did. Yeah, they've done some quite, you know. But that all folded a few years ago. People have splintered off from that, just like all the people that used to work for Whitehead's in Oldham have splintered off and set up their own companies, in you know, that part of Manchester.

SN: Right, ok.

KL: So do you find it's the same people going in for the same work? You know, do you keep coming across the same companies?

CB: Oh yes. You'll know, you'll know who, you know, if you get a job from Villers, you'll know who they'll have gone to. It's the same 4 or 5 people all the time.

SN: What about if you are going further afield, like to the, Wakefield and that, or err Grimsby? Does it tend to vary a little bit more?

CB: It varies then yeah. If you go down to Wakefield, you probably find people, you know, from further south, from Nottingham or, you know, places like that, or Sheffield, or, you know, people coming across from Manchester. Errm, you know, we know of companies in Manchester that employ guys that live in Doncaster. So they tend not to if they've got work on this side of the Pennines, then, you know, that's a bonus for them, cos it saves them travelling. You know, these guys that used to work for us until, you know, Beeston's folded in '95. You know, guys were employed by Beeston's. We had a big team of guys who...that lived in the Doncaster area, 6 or 7 of them.

SN: Oh I see

CB: I mean one of them, well two of them, have set up their own businesses.

(Phone rings).

CB: You know, they're still active down in...down in that part of the world I think. Well there were 3, I think 1 of them's sort of semi-retired now, but that was all sort of spalled out of, you know, err Beeston. Err...

SN: Right

CB: And there were people that, erm, the two guys that managed the business, Beeston in York here, erm, only stayed about 3 months after I moved up to take control of their little empire, before they left and set up by themselves. Anyway, which was, you know, fairly predictable, but err, a bit...a bit of a body blow for my poor old director. He didn't expect them to stab him in the back quite so quickly.

SN: Huh!

CB: But err, as I tried to point out to him, you know, that was one of the reasons he wanted me to come up here in the first place, was to try and sort things out. What did he expect?

SN: Well, yeah.

CB: That's right. Particularly when you come from the south and try to tell northerners what to do!

SN: Especially Yorkshire people!

CB: That's right

Laughing

CB: Never mind, they got over it. Now one of them's moved down, lives in Chichester, so...

SN: Oh really?

CB: Yeah, poor chap.

KL: Do you ever work with any other firms? You know, sort of, get together, perhaps for a bigger job?

CB: No. Never the twain will meet.

KL: Just not interested?

CB: I don't think the architects would be happy. We wouldn't be that bothered. Erm, we may, if worse comes to the worst, we may subcontract to them, but we certainly wouldn't get together and do any kind of joint ventures.

KL: Right

CB: With anybody. Err, you know there are various people about that we would sub-contract to, erm, but...

KL: So, that would be really just because of the architects, not...

CB: Because of the architects, our own personal preference, and ways of working. I think, I may be wrong, but I would think that if you spoke to, you know, other people, they would probably say the sort of 'well, you know, we wouldn't like to work with Firm03SM. You know, if we're gonna do the job we'll do it ourselves'. We can always find, you know, there's loads of erm, you know, self employed people around, erm scratting about, doing bits and pieces here there and everywhere. But if you said, oh you know, 'I've got three months work or, you know, and we've got a couple of guys that'll come into the workshop and work, just work stone, on a price. And err, so if you've got something that you need bashing out in a hurry, or if you've got an awful lot that needs bashing out slowly, erm you can say 'right, you know, give us a price for all these bits and pieces', and they'll either work from here or else they'll take them back to some garage somewhere round the back streets and work them there.

KL: So is this just really cos then you can, I suppose, have more control...?

CB: Yes, you have more control and you make more money! Because you know, obviously, if you're employing, if you're doubling up with another company that's got, you know, it's own yard or it's own van, it's own, you know, workforce, it's own manager, you've gotta pay all of that. Whereas if you just take on three guys that are, you know, basically working for a wage, and you transport them to site and you manage them, economically it's much more, err, viable. I mean the only things obviously we do have to subcontract and work in partnership with people is things like, you know, slate roofing, lead roofing, you know, tiling works, erm, maybe really extensive sort of plumbing, you know, rainwater down pipes and things like that. But more often than not we do that sort of thing ourselves. And really complicated joinery work, you know, if its say, you know, erm quality windows and doors, and, you know, internal works, things like that, electrical works, plumbing inside, we wouldn't touch that. Most of the other trades we would pretty well do ourselves, erm, particularly the joinery for erm you know, roof repairs, erm joinery that's needed to relay lead roofs on, which is quite an art in itself, to get it all right, making sure that it fits all the relevant standards. So we would tend to do that ourselves, rather than subcontract that to a carpentry or joinery company.

KL: Right, oh right.

SN: Cos when you look at the qualifications, they don't, I mean, they're not that wide are they? They tend to be quite specific to particular trades. The NVQ qualifications.

CB: Mmm.

SN: So the other things that your guys are maybe doing, they're not getting kind of recognised qualifications for.

CB: No. No they're not. Ah, certainly some of the joinery work and things like that they don't. But, erm, (sighs), I don't know, it sounds a bit er, sort of big headed, but one of the difficulties about getting joinery companies to do this, particularly say, putting new timber gutters in for lead, for lead work. You've got a very tightly written specification by the lead development association that say, you know, 'thou shalt do it exactly like this'. We know how the plumbers want it to look like and how they want it to feel before they lay their lead on it, and a lot of it is down to the maths of working out, you know, how high various things are, how long the bays are, which is how long your bits of lead are, because obviously your bits of lead can't be too long the other way, cos they expand and contract and split if they're too big. Erm, and if you've got, you know, 20 metres of gutter and you've got two outlets and you've got a parapet work that's already yay high, you've just got to sit down very carefully, on a drawing or, you know, with a calculator and a big piece of paper, and do the maths and work it all out. Once you've worked it out and you can say 'right, you know, we'll start here, and we'll do this, we'll do that, that goes to there, this one goes to there, that'll fini'...and hopefully, fingers crossed, erm, you know, it'll all be right for when the plumbers turn up. And actually doing it isn't so much the problem, erm, you know. So a lot of the guys, I'll say to them 'right, ok, well, we'll put that on there, I'll screw this here, right, get those boards, put that, nail those in there', and then, you know, magic gas-powered nail gun. It's not high class, it's not quality joinery.

SN: No

CB: It's just maths and a bit of common sense, so that's what we, you know, so, we tend to do that ourselves.

SN: Right, ok.

CB: Which is maybe one of the places where we, we're a bit more efficient and err, we can make a bit more money than some of the other people, who maybe wouldn't want to do that. But for us its, you know, it's simple. And also, you have more control, because, you know, you rip it all out, you find that there's an absolute can of work underneath, so you get the architect down, and instead of having someone that you then, will then disappear off and say 'well actually, let me know when you're ready, I'll come back when you're ready, and I'll sort it out', you can actually get the architect and you can say 'well actually I think we need to do this', and you can get on and do that, and then you can do the next stage and then the next stage. And it's done. You're not beholden to other people for, in terms of your programme. And also, from a commercial point of view, if erm, that's where the extras are, that's where there's money to be made, in all the problems, then why pay someone else to sort your problems out. You may as well sort them out yourself. Make the money yourselves. Which, in parti..., even more so in the past couple of years. This is where, from a commercial point of view, this is where you have to be a lot more acute, err, craft. Hence the proverb...use of the term. We're talking about craft, that's what it's all about!

(Laughter)

KL: We're searching for a definition of that word.

CB: That goes back to Chaucer doesn't it?

SN: Does it?

KL: I don't know my Chaucer.

CB: Yes! Oh yes, poor old Absolon and his glowing plough shaft. Anyway, we digress.

SN: The only other thing that I kind of picked up on was that, we haven't talked about subcontracting specifically, but you seem to have experience of both being a subcontractor and taking on subcontractors for bigger jobs. And you're comfortable with both ways of working?

CB: Yes.

SN: I think that's it then isn't it really?

CB: I mean the only things, the only thing we are uncomfortable about if we are subcontracting is erm getting paid.

SN: Right ok.

CB: That's the big problem with subcontracting. Is the money.

SN: Right.

CB: Because when a main contractor is looking for a subcontractor they'll promise you the earth and they'll do anything they can to get you on site and then of course once you're on site you're tied in and if you don't get paid then it can be a nightmare. We had a recent instance of why there's no point subcontracting. We had a guy ring up from a firm in Doncaster who'd got a job in the centre of York on a private house and they wanted a price for two stone transom bars, that's the horizontal bit that supports the mullions. And I think our price to start with was about £600, and then they said they wanted us to do something else and something else, and it went up to £800. So we got the

stone, took half a day to work it, went down the next day and fixed it. Job done. Took us 8 weeks to get this cheque for £800 out of him. So you think well, you know, 'what is the point'? There's no point at all.

KL: So it's the delay then, is the real issue here

CB: Yeah, yeah, you tend, you know. And there's a big risk at the moment that erm you subcontract to someone and, you know, they may not be there in two or three week's time. The only reason that they're picking on you is cos no-one else will touch them with a barge pole. So you have to be very wary as to who you subcontract with. We haven't subcontracted, apart from this little job, I don't think we've had any subcontracting work for a good 18 months.

KL: So it's quite a small percentage then

CB: A very small percentage. Yeah, we would normally, we would normally endeavour, if at all possible to work direct for the client.

SN: But does that mean that there are certain jobs that are very big that you can't do, or do you feel...

CB: Yes. There are certain jobs that we, we wouldn't be able to do. Because they involve subcontracting. But if you look at the returns in sort of financial terms, they're not worth doing. Because what they, what those sort of main contractors want is that they want all the benefits of having a company like ours that can produce the method statements and the risk assessments and have got the trained workforce, who've got the cards, but they actually want the same price that they'd pay to a couple of labour only guys, you know, who just turn up and do what they're told. Erm, it doesn't matter what they say pre-tender about 'well you know it's all about quality' and all the rest of it. We price to do Freesia House, which is a prestigious project on the outskirts of Stockton.

KL: Stockton, yeah, Eaglescliffe.

CB: Erm, priced it for three or four companies. And one of them rang up and said

'are you happy with your prices?' and I said

'yeah, it's a tight price, but, you know, we could do with the work. Yeah, it's a tight price, we know we'll have to work hard but we'll make some money out of it'.

'Oh right, ok'. And a few weeks went passed and we got another phone call from someone else, erm

'can we have your price for Freesia House',

'well, why?'

'oh well, we think we've got the job'. So we sent them the price and they rang back a couple of days later

'erm, how much can you knock off?'. And we said

'we can't knock anything off, how much do you wanna knock off?'

Ahh well, err it's not err, it's a bit more than what we've got in our bill'. So you think well how have they priced it in the first place. So if they've gone in that keen, you're thinking, well, three or four months into the project, are they still gonna be there? So we said

'no we can't knock anything off',

'oh right I'll come back to you'. And we haven't heard anything from it. Erm, and we've learnt from various other sources that the job's been an absolute nightmare.

SN: Oh really?

CB: Because, you know, it's been under priced and they haven't got enough money to resource it properly, quality of the work. And yet it was for a very well respected Manchester based architect, erm, well known for doing prestigious heritage type buildings, and you think, well if they can't sort things out and manage these sort of things properly, what hope is there for us. So, no, you know...

KL: And is that something that's present, you know sort of, through your experience, ongoing, or is it just the current sort of financial climate that's making it worse.

CB: It's become far worse, far worse in the present climate. And the only exception to that is that we have rather incestuous relationship with a local shop fitting company who have a contract, major contract with Zabel bank. And every now and gain we get a phone call

'can you come and sort this cash machine out, you know cash point out. And so we've been all over the country erm braying holes in walls, putting bits of stone back. I mean we did one at the bottom end of Saddler Street in Durham, the street that comes down from the Cathedral.

KL: Oh yeah, yeah.

CB: And you hit the Zabel bank there. Portland stone, beautiful bit of building. And the new cash machine had to look as though it was, you know, not part of the building originally, but as though it's been intended to be part of the building. Erm, so that was a couple of weekends work and maybe three or four nights as well. Erm and we get paid well for that, you know, that's, they're good, profitable jobs. But, you know, basically, they pick up the phone and, you know, they say 'jump' and you just say, you know, 'well, where and how far?' If they want you to go then you've got to go. I've got to go to Clitheroe this week I think because we've got a bank to do there, but they haven't said when. So I think Thursday night I may be in Clitheroe.

KL: That's Preston way isn't it?

CB: Yeah, it is, yeah. It's the other side.

KL: So that's national?

CB: No, it's north of England, north of England. The furthest we've been is erm Cleveleys I think. Which is over towards Fleetwood, Blackpool way. Yeah. So that's different, that's subcontracting, sorry I kind of dismissed that...

KL: No, no.

CB: ...cos we don't look on that as traditional subcontracting, because we have a good relationship with this company. We've been doing things like this for them for a few years. It started off when Zabel bought Burmatoft bank, they suddenly realised that they had very little in the way of disabled access because most of the banks had steps on. So we had a manic period where we'd be out at nights, you know, with an angle grinder, slicing the tops off steps so people could roll into the banks on wheel chairs. And then they got onto the worst ones, they'd actually put proper access ramps in, so we did a couple of those and now they're on, sort of second stage of upgrading the banks and they're taking out all the old cash points and putting in these erm, BPIMs, which allows you to pay money in as well as take it out.

KL: Oh, ok

CB: Often we're taking out night safes have gone off the ball now. There's no point in having night safe cos nobody's got any cash to stick in a night safe, so you can have a business, business paying in machine for businesses to go in and pay in what money they want, but they can also put in cheques and things like that. And the general public can use it. So we've, you know, you end up knocking out a night safe and putting in...

KL: So you're almost like on call for that? Just when a job needs doing...

CB: Yeah, we get, it's not exactly the end of the phone...

KL: Not quite...

CB: We know when they're coming because they'll ask us to give them a price.

KL: Right ok.

CB: Then once we've, but usually they want the price within two days, so. I mean we did one in Carlisle back in the summer, and erm we didn't have any time to go and look at it. We just had to price it off the photographs and, you know, hope for the best. But err, it was quite funny, because the back of this night safe, this huge steel trunk, erm to stop people breaking into the bank and sitting there with a bag where you're gonna stuff the money in. So there's this massive great lump of steel which we had to get out, but luckily we found a local scrap dealer who could come along at 7 o'clock at night with his lorry with a big crane on, take this lump of steel away from the middle of Carlisle. We created a bit of a traffic jam, but...

(laughter)

CB: It was done in the end. But, sorry, but again getting back, for a company like that, health and safety is absolutely paramount, so you would have to sit and write a specific risk and method statement for each one of those. All the manual handling, COSH, assessments for all the dust, etc, etc. When your guys get to site they've all gotta be, you know, clean tidy, helmet, gloves, boots, identifying vest, badge, you know, the full lot, so they know exactly who they are and what people are doing.

KL: Yes.

SN: Is it a competitive process or, you said about giving a price, or is that just so that they can give a price to the bank, or do they get prices from other companies as well?

CB: I'm not sure.

SN: But you always seem to get the work.

CB: We always seem to get the work.

KL: It must be?

SN: But it might not be competitive, mightn't it if it's the bank? Cos they're private.

CB: Erm, the bank only have one contractor. This contractor has got a term...they've got something like 12000 Zabel banks to do in the next four years, or something like that. So they're...they've got this contract. So it's up to them how they source the subcontractors. And I'm not sure. Sometimes, I know they go out...they do get prices for this work. But sometimes they don't, if it's really complicated. They just ring us up and say, you know, 'can you do it'?

KL: Go with who they think...

SN: Right, ok.

CB: Cos it gets very complicated cos there's...all these new cash machines, are all put in to suit the new DDA regs, so they've got to be, there's a certain height, there's a certain height that the 5 key on the key pad has got to be at.

SN: Is that where they measure it from?

CB: Yeah. The 5 key has gotta be a certain height above pavement level.

SN: Oh, ok.

CB: So, and the way you work that out is not simple, so we've got a manual yay thick from NCR, which gives you the shapes and sizes and the heights and the configurations of every single NCR cash machine. So if they tell you which one it is, then you can work out 'ah, well in that case we need to cut the hole there, because the 5 key is 123mm above the bottom of the hole'. But when it's, your just kind of working in a big nasty, messy environment and the floor of the bank inside is here and the floor outside is there, and so you say 'so in fact we've got to dig a hole in the floor to drop this thing into', so yeah. So there's a lot of interface between us and them, because we tend to do the outside but the inside is just as important because they've got to get this machine in somehow, and they're big and cumbersome. They've gotta get them in, they can only be done, they can only be put in on certain days, the guys that shift the cash machines are a specialist team and they're booked up, so if you don't hit the day when the cash machine is gonna come then, you know...very often the programmes of the banks might only be 6 weeks. So it's not as if you can afford to dilly-dally. So when they say bang...

KL: And do you do any buildings...modern...or is it just the older buildings that you work on?

CB: Anything, absolutely anything.

KL: Anything. That's quite a contrast to some of your other work really isn't it?

CB: Oh yeah. But in the past we've done, I mean for this same company, not recently, but in the past, they had a massive new build and shopfitting project up in Eyr and we did all the granite for the shop front. All the stall risers and clad all the columns in granites, and the fascias, you know, all the rest of it um. Which again is all down to the drawing, cos it's, you know, it's just thick wall papers. So long as you make sure that they're all the right size. That's all it is, it's just bits of wall paper stuck round, erm.

SN: I thought it was hung sometimes on steel...

CB: Oh it is, yeah, but it's not solid stone, it's cladding, so you haven't got anything thicker than 20mm, so if you've gotta piece at the front, and then you've got, you know, around a column, you've got the returns on either side. It's just a bit at the front, two sides. So it's not like a whole, huge solid piece of stone you've gotta find. So all the bits, you know, yeah, you wire it all together and the top bits will have little stainless steel corbel brackets underneath them and fancy hooks and things like that.

SN: And do you manufacture those pieces or do they buy the stone and then you fix it?

CB: Some of it we'd make ourselves, if it was stone, we'd make ourselves, but it's marble and granite or anything like that we'd just do drawings and sub it out to someone. Get a specialist, marble, granite manufacturer to make it.

SN: Right ok.

CB: And that could be, you know, anywhere, Aberdeen, Full Sutton, there's a big marble and granite company out of Full Sutton that um um what else to we use? Anywhere. Doesn't really matter.

SN: Right.

CB: So long as you've got a drawing, they'll make it. So then, this is the other thing, this is the thing that's important for the apprentices. That you know, one of them we need to get in and do much more drawing work, cos he's not drawing enough at the moment. He needs to be drawing so that he can, cos if you can't draw it you can't think, if you can't draw it you can't make it. Even sketches, erm, I was doing sketches last night for butts of, we actually need some fancy oak for a ceiling in Sprotborough church and the joiner is in Richardtown, and they're big, you know, they're sort of yay big bits of oak, with fancy mouldings on them, and where they finish, at the end of the ceiling, the moulding stops and there's a, what they call, it's a stop, it's a fancy sort of carved stop that stops the moulding and finishes it off. So I did a little sketch of, you know, what it looks like so he knows what to, what to price and that's what we would expect the apprentices to do. For a piece of stone you've gotta be able to sketch it and make sense of it.

SN: Do they do the banker route at college not the fixer route?

CB: Yes, yeah. Not much point in doing the fixer route, they can pick the fixing up. Well, the fixing, the fixing was much more what Bill Bassett was looking at with their...

SN: With the heritage?

CB: With the heritage card?

SN: Right ok.

CB: Because he was interested in the heritage type fixing.

SN: Yeah, he wouldn't want to see the cladding would he?

CB: No.

SN: No. So he's quite interested in things being, in stones being taken out and being put back in and being very sensitive to the surrounding stone and things like that.

CB: That's right, yes.

SN: Ok, but before that it's the banker one that you're interested in. That's interesting.

CB: Yes, yeah. If you can make it then you can, you know, be learnt how to fix it. As they say. But err. It's funny, I didn't realise that there was much of a fixer mason's course.

SN: Yeah there's two routes I think, I think.

CB: But if you're a mason you've gotta be, well I don't know, maybe I'm just old fashioned, but if you're a mason, you can't call yourself a mason unless you can actually pick up a mallet and chisel and make it. Or, you know, pick up an angle grinder and make it.

(phone rings)

CB: These days...errr...can only use a mallet and chisel when necessary.

SN: OK. Well what do you think Kim? I think...

KL: Yeah. Can I just ask, is there anything else...particularly thinking about the Local Authority type work. Is there anything else that you would like to just add, that we haven't covered, that either really frustrates you or is maybe even good about it? You know, are there any advantages to working with those sorts of people?

CB: Uhm...it's mixed. Um, some of the Local Authorities are much better than others. Ah, I mean I think that unfortunately they're so hide-bound with this idea of best value, the competitive tendering process, that they've really lost sight, you know, of what the final aim is to be. And the trouble is that anyone, eh hem, pretty well anyone can get on a local authority tender list. You only have to have breath in your body as far as I can see, and you can get on a local authority tendering list. The classic example for us was, this was for Wakefield, Beaconsfield Castle, open invitation to tender, all done electronically, erm, you had to...go through a pre-tender assessment form, er and then if you were successful with that then you were invited to tender. And I think there were, in the end there were 12 people tendering for this job, and then as part of your submission you had to erm, put it, you know, you various qualifications etc etc, and then it was weighted qualifications vs. price and, you know, adjusted, and we didn't get it, it was gone to a company from London. How they can come up to Wakefield and, their specialists...we looked at them on the website, erm, I forget what they...not Keeley, that's Keeley-Bose the big civil engineering company.

SN: They did St Marks though. Keeley-Bose, did St Marks, yeah.

CB: Did they?

SN: Yeah, they're a house builder.

CB: Well my nephew in law works for them in Bristol and they're doing Bristol Old Vic theatre...say no more. (sigh)
Yes.

SN: It's interesting isn't it because you wouldn't associate with them with somewhere like...I don't know...they're a massive company!

CB: Yes.

KL: Do you think they'll let the work out to somebody else then?

CB: Well possibly, they'll get some local guys in. But one of the points, you got a lot of points, you got a lot of brownie points for having your own masons. Are you gonna employ your own masons? Possible score, you know, 20.

KL: Oh, so presumably...

CB: You know, having experience of restoration work in Beaconsfield, you know 2. It was just a, just a charade. I don't know, I get very frustrated because basically anyone, anyone can get on the list. They'll go out to you know, 8 or 9 small companies, a mixture and big and small, and if they go to their own in-house, you know, their own DLO or, you know, like the normal City Council monuments department you're wasting your time, because at the end of the day you know that they'll get the job because they've put in a cheap price. And if they start to struggle, oh well, I know they say they don't, but I'm sure they find ways of helping each other out. Err, but to be fair we have erm a good relationship with this guy in Wakefield Highways and Bridges, bridges section, erm, but as he admitted, he's only got four bridges within the Wakefield area that are ancient monuments. We've done two of them now so there's only two left to do. So unless, he said 'unless one of them gets creamed by an articulated lorry in the next few months', he said

'you probably won't be hearing from me for a while'. The one we did was the chantry bridge in Wakefield, and that was funny cos it all had...suddenly they realised they were opening the new Hepworth gallery and they didn't want nasty builders with dirty scaffolding on chantry bridge...could we please hurry up and get it done? An absolute mad panic to be open, finished and away by 20th of May this year. But, you know, we did. You know, as case of having to...it's a bit like shop fitting contracts, you just have to get on.

SN: So when you, I mean we've mentioned North Yorkshire before, when you said that the quality of work, you weren't interested in it, it's because the quality of work being done means you wouldn't be able to price competitively with that because you would just do a better job.

CB: Yes.

SN: They're a huge stockholder...they much have so many listed and scheduled bridges.

CB: Yes.

KL: That's right, yes.

SN: What about things like schools and police stations? And does...NHS sometimes has quite old buildings as well doesn't it?

KL: Yes, they do yes.

CB: Yes we did do St Catherine's House in Doncaster which was a...for erm NHS Trust. That was about 1830's grade II listed building.

SN: Right ok.

CB: Which was quite interesting. That was a competitive tender through erm, I think there 4 on the list for that. We were lucky to get that one.

SN: Right, ok.

KL: So, you've not been put off going...you know, it sounds like you're getting quite a bit of work. Obviously you're going for...

CB: Oh yes, yes. But you just have to be, you know, you just have to be a bit wary. I mean I, we've had several things to price of Edgedale District Council. But it's just wasting your time.

SN: Oh really?

CB: Erm, they've, you know, they've got a few bits and pieces but nothing really seems to come of it.

KL: So when you say it's wasting your time, what exactly is it that...

CB: Well, because, you need to put, you still need to put a fair bit of effort into preparing an estimate. You've got to make a site visit, go out, take a few photographs, sit down, you know, quantify it all, put prices against everything, you know, write the letter, fill the tender form in, erm...

KL: And are the jobs not big enough or you just don't think you've got a chance of getting it?

CB: Erm, often the jobs aren't big enough erm, but even if they are big enough, they, as I said, they will go out, they have a very wide spread of contractors and some of them, particularly in this day and age, are so desperate for work that they'll throw their hat at anything. And, err, even if they've never used lime mortars before, they'll say, you know,

'oh yeah, we've used lime mortars, we've done this and we've done that'. But it's, you know, I'm very cynical in the reasonably advanced ages that I have, because this is nothing new. In, you know, '89, what was it '87, '88, there was a really bad recession in the building trade. I was working for a company in Bath then and we had a specialist joinery division, painting division, masonry division, refurbishment, building. You know, we did things like erm doing up the Royal Crescent Hotel in Bath when it was done up first in the late '80s. And as soon as the recession hit, all the builders that had been building tin sheds and houses and various things suddenly reinvented themselves as restoration specialists 'we've always done restoration', you know 'we've always done this, we've got', you know, 'we've always done that'. Erm and it's, it's happening now.

KL: And they're not really looking for evidence of that then, from the sounds of it, they're turning a blind eye to it?

CB: You get the feeling that everyone starts to hide behind everyone else, that you employ an architect who's qualified and you ask them to draw up a tender list. And the architect says you know 'we'll only go to people who are qualified to do this work' and you know, supposedly then you have a list of people who are qualified to do that work, erm, but you know, if one of them slips through the net for whatever reason, erm, then you know, you can end up with someone getting the contract that's got no real expertise and no real interest, erm and then quality just goes down the tubes. That's the trouble. And particularly at the moment with the sort of prices that people are able to get work at, erm, you know, you can see why, because you look at the prices that some people put in for work. I mean, look at that, that's erm that's Baldersby Park, it's an obelisk in Baldersby Par, right? That's the spread of prices and we're in the middle.

KL: Gosh, yes.

CB: Well, I know it sounds likes sour grapes but what's the difference in price? About £14k.

KL: Yes

CB: Well, we didn't even...we hardly had £14k...we haven't got anywhere near £14k for scaffolding, overheads or anything, and you think, well, how on earth is someone, cos there's a fair bit of provision, a lot of provisional sums in there. And we...it involved draining a lake and digging out a lake, and we got prices from the three suggested ground work contractors that the...Harrison listed, plus one other that we thought might be cheaper, and he was, but only by £1000. All the groundwork prices were about £35k, for all the ground works, it was a big a big lake erm. So you take that out of that figure and then you think you've got...you know you've gotta buy various other bits and pieces, and you've gotta take the obelisk down and then you've gotta rebuild it, and you've gotta pull the...and there's, you know, two cubic metres of new stone, so that's gonna cost you £3.5k. Erm, you know think of all, by the time you strip it all out, £5k worth of contingency and a few provisional sums, strip it all out, you're basically left with next to bugger all. If you divide that...OK, so you know it's gonna take, say six weeks, divide that figure by six weeks, divide it by two men...hang on...they're only paying them like £80 a week. There's something wrong. You know there's something wrong there. Either they've missed something out or you've missed something. Erm, and obviously no-one like to think that they're wrong, but you know, what's interesting in there is that the next figure, the one above us...

KL: (Quietly) 90 something

CB: That's £11k. £15k between us and the lowest and £11k between us and the highest. So my old boss always used to say that third was the right figure. That if you got a spread of tenders, the price that was third was about the right price. And the other two were too low. He also used to say that the only way to get a job was to leave something out.
(Laughter)

KL: Presumably they have to say 'well it's not just off price, that also meets all the other quality criteria' is what they would...

CB: Of course they would

KL: ...have to say of course.

CB: Yeah, but you see the thing is....what will happen is that you, know you, you get a tender where somebody's, you know, £20k cheaper. They'll look at that and the church warden will sit 'round and say 'oh we've only got so much in the bank Mr architect'. And they'll say 'well let's take him and even we have a spend another £15k, it's still cheaper than t'other bugger!'. And you've got the risk, if you take the second price, that you'd still get a claim for all the extras. So you're still better off, financially you're still better off taking the cheaper price. And what the client would be looking to the architect to do is to give them the same quality. But we know from working with various architects that it's not a level playing field. It's not just sour grapes, but, you know, we had one particular instance of the church at Foston-on-the-Wolds, which we took down the tower and rebuilt the tower. Nice job, ah, architect very pleased. And then, the next phase of work was to erm do some roofing and re-render the sides of the clerestory on the north side. And about...I think it's probably finished by now, but the architect actually had the nerve to ring Geoff and ask him what mortar mix we'd used when, cos we'd done the sample panels for English Heritage on the side of the church. What mortar mix and how did Clive do it? Because the contract they'd got on site couldn't get the rendering right. You think well 'where's the justice in that'?

KL: Yes...it is...what a cheek!

CB: Oh yeah, yeah, what a cheek. But, that's what it's all about. So, you know, you have to be much more claims conscious erm err, my friend there is very good at putting claims together and getting money out of people. We have to be much more ruthless. I mean this job in Doncaster that we did, on St Catherine's House, at the pre-contract meeting we said, look 'you've gone out, you've got competitive prices, don't expect us to treat you the same way we would have done if this had been a negotiated contract, because there are gonna be lots of extras. You know, when you start opening the building up, it's gonna be a mess, and we want our pound of flesh. We're not exactly after our pound of flesh and the blood, but we want our pound of flesh'. And they said, 'well, err, umm, we understand that, that's fair, it's a commercial world, etc etc'. But that used to be the way that they, church architects would go out to competition, they'd get the lowest tender, you'd all sit 'round in the freezing cold in the vestry for the pre-contract meeting and put arms 'round each other and say 'we're not gonna hurt each other now are we?'. They want the same treatment from a negotia...from a tendered bid as they would from a negotiated contract. Well you know, those days are gone now. There are a couple of con...a couple of our competitors who unfortunately still, you know, do roll over and play dead when the architect says 'oh, phh, I think you ought to swallow that really, you should've known that that

was...I'd inferred that in the spec. I know it's not actually written it, its inferred'. So now what you're finding is that when architects are writing specifications they're being much more erm clever as to how they write things up, what they'. Got this lovely one...from Villers...

(Leaves rooms)

CB: ...Spotborough. You've got this knackered old timber roof on the south isle, you've gotta take it all apart, put loads of new oak beams into it. There we go...so this is the key, so anything that's red or blue has got to be replaced.

SN: Oh really?

CB: And then, what she says is you know, 'repair this', 'scarf a section of this', 'do that', 'do that', 'cut out section of wall plate, replace the oak fascia, *include here for all miscellaneous bridal straps, plates, side splices and any other items not covered by items above.* Stain or paint to match with the existing'. Well, you know, what do you know, no, we haven't allowed for it. Go away, because, what she's forgotten here, provisionally replace secondary beam, that beam there, that beam there, all moulded, solid oak. It's not actually listed in the schedule of works and then when you go to the back where all the provisional items are it's not listed as a provisional item. So what they've done there it's as though they've said 'allow provisionally for two extra bits of 1200mm long moulded bits of beam'. So you know, the architects are becoming more cunning, so we have to be more cunning as well. Umm and unfortunately, you know, it's getting to be a vicious world out there. The sort of cosy days of, you know, everyone being fairly friendly with these sort of jobs is gone. But we have always, we've always maintained our view that you may as well have the shouting and the arguments first and get all the tears over with, and then you can kiss and make up rather than letting it drift on to the end and then having a big barney, when possibly they haven't got the money, cos that's the other problem with the church is, that you've got to know that...how much grant have you got? Have you got the balance of the grant? Where is it? Is it on 90 days deposit? ? Have you got a treasurer who's not prepared to release it because he's going to save 3p in interest if he doesn't release the money for, you know, 30...we've had all of that with people. So you just have to get it out in the open to start with. So sometimes I think you know, people say, 'oh Firm03SM are a bit aggressive when it comes to money...', you know, 'always like to their hands on the cash'. But, we like to get our...it'd be nice to know that people have got the cash, not to get our hands on their cash as soon as we can, but at least they know if we say 'well, you know, we spent so much so far, this is the projected final account, this is where you're gonna end up with at then of the day...this project that the North York Moors National Park have funded is on a erm old watermill building in Lastingham on the edge of the Moors....near, not far from Kirkbymoorside'

KL: Near the church?

CB: Yes, yes there is.

KL: With the crypt?

CB: Yes, that's it. Yes and a nice pub, the Blacksmith's Arms.

KL: Yes!

CB: And we didn't realise there was a watermill there, tucked away. It's amazing, wonderful. Remains of the old wheel in this little wheel house, there's remains of the bits of the mill, there's the bottom of the stone. The top stone's gone,,

but there's bits and pieces of shafting and cogs and all sort of goodies buried away. Erm, so we've ripped it apart, mended all the roof, put new tiles on the roof, done all sorts of things. And it's just gr...as we've ripped it apart, or carefully dismantled it, as they say, you know, we've found all sorts of horrors. We've just kept saying to the architect 'look, you know, we've got this, do you want us to do that?'. 'Yes', and they've said 'well if the worst comes to the worse, we'll omit, you know, x, y and z because they're not really necessary. We want to get the roof on, get all that done'. And now they've said, we told them a couple of weeks ago that 'you can either omit all of these, in which case the final account is going to be whatever, or you can add it all back in, add a bit more besides, and the final account is going to be z'. And they've said 'actually we want to get on and get it all done. The client doesn't want to mess about in three or four years time doing it again. We'll have one hit, we'll have the pain and suffering now'. But at least they knew how much they were gonna suffer, rather than waiting until the end saying 'oh well actually, you know'.

KL: They're making that choice aren't they...yeah...the consequences...

CB: Well you have to give them the information. That's...that's what we see as part of the contract, that you give them, you present them with that information. And luckily, you know, Geoff is in the office and I'm in the office a fair bit, we can actually do that. We have the mechanisms to do that, and present that to people. Which some people don't, but err... So...

SN: Thank you very much

KL: Yes.

CB: Quite all right.

Vernon Wiggins, Firm04Ro. November 21st 2011

SN: Ok, so it's November the 21st and it's Kim Loader, erm, and Sophie Norton from the University of York, talking to Vernon Wiggins, erm, about Firm04Ro. Erm, I Sophie am from the Archaeology Department and I work specifically with conservation studies, and so I'm interested in building conservation and how small craft companies relate to the wider conservation sector. Er, and Kim and I are both interested in small, medium sized enterprises and Kim is mainly interested in the relationship with the public sector. Because there are links between the public sector and conservation, we're trying to, you know, bring the three things together to look at craft companies and the sort of supply chain within conservation and the public sector. So we've got kind of four main themes that we wanted to talk about, erm, ranging from practices, experiences with the public sector, and, err, training, things like that, and we've conducted the interviews quite informally so far, and we're basically just started off by asking you how you came to be where you are and how the people that work in the company are....have trained to the level that they're working at basically. And also how many people are in the company.

VW: Ok, yep, well Firm04Ro was set up in 1969, err, there was two partners, there was my father David Wiggins and a person called Nigel Clar...Nigel Booth sorry. And basically both of them came out of a tiling background when we had the housing boom basically, about the '60s. At that time one of the tile manufacturers, Marlin, used to have erm, representatives that went out and got specifications for work and then they would say to the house builder 'I can get you so and so to come and tile these blocks in'. And that's how Firm04Ro more or less came together, it was a union between erm my father who had worked on the kind of estimating, specification side and Nigel Booth who had worked from a craft background. As the firm kind of developed, err, over the years and became more formal, the partnership didn't particularly work, so Nigel Booth went off and he set up another tiling company and my father carried on running Firm04Ro. We were then starting into other areas rather than just housing and we kind of came in contact with quite a few architects and developed basically the slating background to the extent that we now do much more slating than we do tiling, but we need to do both sides of it and we have to look at the wide spread of clients, du...because we can't get enough heritage work coming through the door. We've...I mean...I th...basically he had...started to develop the connections with the architects, and at that time a lot more roofing projects used to be direct with the architect and the client, whereas nowadays a lot of the heritage work is grant based, and therefore it might not just be a roof that...we'll then be looking at improving other aspects, so kind of, from our side a lot more work is...we become a subcontractor and the main contractor on a job. Err, but we've developed our skills and expertise over the years to the extent that we have had some two, if not three generation families that have worked for us, err, and some of the people that have worked for us have received skills awards from the college. We also try and look to take every year an apprentice on to bring people through into it, cos yes we've now people that've worked for us 30 years, erm, and some of them are getting to the stage where in the next five or six years they'll be looking to retire. And they've got a wealth of knowledge, experience that they've gained over the years. Most of the lads, well all the lads that we have now all have Cities and Guilds and tend to come out of college that way, and have learnt... Quite a few of the older ones do have Cities and Guilds, or apprenticeship trained should I say, Cities and Guilds like I say Hoover for a

vacuum. Erm, and we've now got probably about 8 of our lads have heritage cards, so quite a chunk. We....the whole company employs about 22 people, and we've got, there's about 17 craft operatives that work for us.

SN: Ok. And when, just to clear it up, when you City and Guilds, do the...the newer ones have done the NVQ?

VW: Their NVQ, yes.

SN: Right ok. SO their all apprenticeship trained and they all go to Bradford...or Leeds?

VW: They go to Leeds College of Building and depending on their ability they either train to err NVQ2 and a few of them then go onto do the third year, which lifts it up to an NVQ3.

SN: Right ok

VW: But, not all of them like to do the third year cos also in borders on some supervisory kind of activities and they feel, well I haven't got any experience anyway and I just want to go and work and learn a trade. I don't want to be looking at being a supervisor.

SN: Right ok. So when they've got their NVQ2 or their NVQ3 then they work and they don't tend to go for any further training?

VW: They do. It depends. The type of work that they do, I mean every year now we've got to send all the...well everybody's got to undertake an asbestos awareness course, that's health and safety. There's quite a few health and safety things that are driven, every three years they've got to resit their health and safety test for the CSCS cards, ahm, certain of them have er IPAF (*powered access*) certificates and, erm err, towers and the ones for cherry pickers, you know these certificates only last for so long. And we have other things, health...er first aid and we also somebody at the moment that's studying to do his leadwork NVQ and then he's looking at then carrying that on into the heritage world.

SN: Right ok. So is he, is he a tiler already and now doing the lead work?

VW: He is a slater and tiler yeah. His NV...qualification's in that and he's really taken to lead work, and yes we're developing his lead work skills.

SN: Ok.

VW: Really good lead worker.

SN: So would you say that most of the craft operatives, or craftsmen, are kind of multi skilled...they can, they tile and they roof and they work with lead as well.

VW: The ones we employ yes. There are certain nature of err craft lads that have never had any slating experience, so they can't slate, but you tend to find it would work the other way. Slaters can tile but tilers can't always slate. Because of the, they, there's a lot of, it's not just banging them on, there's a lot more work. You've got to set the things up and it's got to work properly.

SN: So most of the people that work for you....

VW: Slate.

SN: Slate.

VW: Yes.

SN Ok, that's interesting. How about things that are sort of associated with slating and tiling like timber structure?

VW: In general terms yes. It all depends on the area of work we're working in. We have done for, like in communities where we've worked for the Council and they have kind of just normal housing stock, then they look for us to do new soffits and fascias and guttering, erm, and there are times where we have put a timber roof structure. We've got a job we've been looking at, Balfour Beattie in the National Park. They're working for National Grid and they've got basically a steel container but because it's the National Park it's got to be inkeeping, so their putting stone walls and a slate roof on top of this...you know, just like you see the containers rolling round. So they were looking at whether we could actually put the timber trusses on it. But, I mean, yes, quite often we'll do guttering and insulation works. Because roof space, well space in total is becoming a premium and quite often people will look to use a roof space as accommodation, office space, so we end up with the warm roof situation which can alter.

SN: Right ok. Erm, and this is a bit of a side, but when you work on listed buildings, do you ever get asked to use erm different types of insulation?

VW: We have, yes.

SN: Like wool and things like that?

VW: Yes. We've just finished in a place called Marple Bridge, which is in a conservation area and it's a public house that goes back ages, and the conservation officer was trying to get us to use sheeps wool as roof insulation, but unfortunately the client wouldn't pay the difference.

SN: Oh really?

VW: Yep. I got a little bit of a shock, the difference between normal quilt and sheeps wool.

SN: Oh really? Is it a big difference?

VW: Two years ago I don't think you could get rid of sh...wool off the back of sheep, you couldn't even get people to shear them, but the value, things have turned around again...

KL: Such a change...

VW: Yeh, wool's back in fashion from even erm to wear, merino wool, because erm the insulation values very good, and if you're out being active, it doesn't become cold like a lot of the synthetics do. So that's gone...and we're back in times that are hard, people have gone back to knitting, so it's lifted the value of wool up. Which then effects...the spin off when you want to use it for insulation, which uses a vast quantity of it, erm it does push the price up.

SN: That's interesting, erm, and we also wonder where you go for certain materials? So if you were gonna buy sheep's wool then where you'd get that, but you know, I'm quite interested in where you get stone slates from and erm you know the welsh slates, blue slate, and the tiles as well. I saw Firm13Ro down there but...

VW: That's it. Firm13Ro is kind of, certainly for 'round here, well you've got Firm13Ro and Greenwood, which are Blythes, are the main two providers 'round here.

SN: Are Greenwood...they're on the Humber as well aren't they?

VW: They are yes.

SN: They're just next door.

VW: Erm, Firm13Ro is obviously a lot bigger operation so if there's anything unusual they will make them. We've used their heritage department before. We did a erm a contract in Liverpool which was erm an old boathouse, a Roman boathouse, and it had the under and over tiles that you usually see abroad. And they manufactured them for us.

SN: Oh really?

VW: So we produced that job. And like this job, cos they're unusual, they been at least 25-30mm thick for the plain tiles, they can produce them for us to make up the short fall.

SN: Right.

VW: Err so clay, yes we can make. Stone slate is a little bit more of a problem because there are no real quarries in this area. There was one in South Ireland that could get them, but you cannot get the slate out long enough to make stone slates. There's err, the only one we really know is Lady Cross Quarry, which is coming into Northumberland and that area. But it's erm a different type of slate to what we have...

SN: Right ok...

VW: ...naturally here. And we did a contract in Wakefield where they...before the thing kicked off it took five years to produce the slate for it. And so they were making it, storing it, making it, storing it, and then obviously with the job went out to tender and they used the slate that they'd already bought. But it's a lot...it's a lot smaller, like I would call a Cotswold slate, but you know a lot of the Yorkshire stone slates can be this length (*much longer*) and you know, you can't get them that long any more.

SN: Do you know where they were quarried?

VW: It always varies. A mean Halifax had an awful lot. When you go 'round and you can see the landscape, you can see where quarries were allover the place, and, you know, they were taking stone and slate out where they came out. So, we rely heavily on reclaimed stone unfortunately. And there are quite a few yards that do stock stone, but it's...there's no rule to it. It all depends when you're looking for some whether somebody's got some on, because it depends whether buildings are being demolished or some people change roof coverings. Or there is the other down side that someone's stripped some barns in the dales somewhere and sells it on.

SN: Yeh. Absolutely.

VW: And the price of stone is err like lead, it encourages people to go out and take the risk to do it.

KL: Forgive my ignorance, but when you're talking about slates there, you're talking about what I think of as a roof made of like stone slabs?

VW: That's right.

KL: Yeh, real, proper stone, as opposed to what I think of as slates. What you've got piled up out there...yeah.

VW: Yes the rows there, they're some brand new Burlington slates, erm that we've got going on the church in Manchester. So we're building, we don't buy direct, although we do have an account with Burlington, but we do tend to buy through a specialist slating merchant. And they...likewise with the Welsh quarries, there's not many of them about now, because McAlpine's have that all more or less tied up, the, cos they've shut quite a few of the Ffestiniog quarries

down, so the grey Welsh slate is hard to come by and it's now more the purple Welsh slate that you see, which is the...

KL: Why have they shut them down? Not viable or?

VW: It's err health and safety, the Health and Safety Executives have said that they need to spend a vast amount of money on bringing the slate quarries back up to a level that they're deemed safe. So they just said we can't afford to put the money into it, so they've mothballed the quarries. And they will come back, it's like tin mines in Cornwall, now they're starting up again because of the value of tin. And it will, in time, will drive it.

KL: Presumably it will reach a point where it's worth making that investment then? If the price...

VW: Hits a...?

KL: Yes.

VW: Yeah.

KL: Get's...a certain level.

SN: Do you but internationally like Spanish slates or...?

VW: We buy Spanish slates, erm, we don't...it doesn't particularly go on heritage work. It's more for commercial housing... We do, there are some very good Spanish slates and the Spanish slate market erm, you can, you know what you're going to get, the quality, like if we buy second hand Welsh slates we can't necessarily dictate the quality, or the size. We have to look what's available and try and get that to fit the job. Whereas we can say we want this size and this quality, and you can get a slate and a half so the detailing work's a lot better.

SN: Right.

DL: Quite often, yes we will kind of try and push people into the Spanish market rather than the second hand Welsh market, from a quality point of view. But we always try and get clients to work...to nominate the slate first, because otherwise you end up in a price market. Someone'll produce, shall we say, the best quality slate, and someone'll say 'I can do you a cheaper price on this slate', and before you know it we...you get down to eco-slates and they're all twisted and bent and odd shapes, and then people say 'oh Spanish is rubbish'. But you pay for what you get. Err we stay clear of the Chinese slates because, I mean and I'm not an academic, but there is talk that it's not a slate, like the Brazilian slates, are not technically slates because, although they've had the pressure on, underground, compressing the materials to form the slate, it hasn't had heat. Like Welsh slate has had both and they form, shall we call a proper slate.

SN: Right that's interesting. Erm, so you said, erm, that you've got jobs in Manchester...and erm around in Yorkshire, so we were wondering how far you actually travel.

VW: We generally we will travel, shall we say the M62 corridor, the M1 north and south, or basically anywhere that's about an hour and a half's travelling distance.

SN: Ok.

VW: I mean we have worked in Newcastle, but you see that's straight up the motorway and back. But we've worked in Weir Valley er but and we lodged there, but when we start to lodge we don't necessarily become competitive.

SN: Right yeah. I see. And, so who would...are most of your competitors similar companies to you?

VW: Not...yes and no. We tend to have a common kind of area, so you might, with one contractor we might do a lot of housing, new housing, and they will do it, but then they won't do the heritage kind of work and we'll cross other people that just do heritage but only have two or three men, so therefore they don't have the workforce to be able to do any more.

SN: Right, ok.

VW: I mean the size of workforce that we have, we've got to have a wide span, so we also work for the Councils and some contractors don't work for the Councils. Erm, and then we tend to work for contractors that maybe do commercial things like supermarkets or office blocks or retail, erm so yes we have...we try and keep a very broad spectrum of clients and areas of work.

SN: So, kind of, who your competitors are depends on the type of job it is. Right ok.

VW: And as well sometimes the area that we working in.

SN: What as in the location?

VW: Well yes, if we're...like working in Manchester we travel there so we're on nearly the edge of our circle, but you've got obviously Manchester contractors, that's their doorstep.

SN: Oh I see.

VW: Yep. So they might, they might not particularly want to come this side of the hill and work in Yorkshire.

SN: No. I see. (To KL) Did you want to ask Vernon a bit about the public sector now?

KL: Yeah. I...you mentioned er Councils. So, what sort of the work would that be? Heritage and, sort of, broader? Mainly kind of standard work...?

VW: It's...tends to be mainly standard work. Odd times, odd buildings do crop up that the council have had in their housing stock for years and years, but sometimes it becomes more their offices tend to be the oldest, the heritage buildings.

KL: Yes, yes.

VW: So you get a cr...a little bit of a cross in that area.

KL: So housing, offices, erm I noticed on your website, I was just having a look, that you'd done the museum in Leeds. So that would be the Council would it, or?

VW: It was originally, yes it was owned by the Cou...and I think it still is, cos it's classed as the erm...

KL: ...Leeds City Museum?

VW: That's it's correct title.

KL: So that, that's perhaps a one off erm sort of situation with the Council?

VW: Yes, but we err, unfortunately we didn't work directly for the council in there because it was the old civic theatre. So it was set up as erm with an auditorium and everything.

KL: Right.

VW: Now they've converted it into a museum so all that auditorium space is galleries.

KL: Right.

VW: So there was a vast amount of....works.

KL: Right ok. So were you....(to SN) sorry were you going to say...?

SN: Sorry I was just gonna say, you were a subcontractor?

VW: We subcontracted. Laing O'Rourke's were the main contractor there yeah.

KL: Right ok.

VW: But we've also done some work on, although not a pub...oh yes it...for Leeds Grand Theatre.

KL: Oh right yeah.

VW: And as I understand it that's own by the council.

KL: Oh...that's interesting.

VW: And along with the city varieties club.

KL: Oh yes, that's undergoing a major renovation...

VW: And that's council property.

KL: So you've done some work on that?

VW: Not on the city varieties...

KL: Oh right.

VW: ...but after we'd finished our work the grand theatre brought us back to do some other work for them direct and the lady that was kind of looking after, shall we call it, estates, she'd been drafted over from the city varieties because that was being...had a major refit going on so there was nothing for her to do.

KL: Oh, that's interesting. So most of the work where you're working for the councils, are you working then directly as a kind of private contractor, well a contractor?

VW: If you're looking from a heritage point of view we tend to be more subcontract because it's always the bigger schemes, erm, but generally then the councils it's more modern stuff and just general err, but it's maintenance stuff and it can be...we worked at Bolling Hall in Bradford, which is owned by the Council.

KL: But that's direct.

VW: That's be direct yeah, they just bring us in to do...and that tends to be more minor works.

KL: Right. And are you err a sort of a preferred supplier or...

VW: Well we like to think so *(laughs)*

KL: Officially though, officially?

VW: I, I, I'd like to think that our reputation tends to get us the work, but the only think these days is you ever know how many boxes their all trying to tick that they want to use somebody from the area that they're in, so yes, we might get dragged more in to Bradford cos then they can tick the box saying 'yes it's a local company'.

KL: Right.

VW: Err, yeah, we've just finished some work on Thornton Road in Bradford, where they've changed a building for the YMCA and they've called it the Culture Fusion. And it's been built off of an old wool warehouse and they've gone and

got a modern bit at the back. So it's modern meets heritage. Err and I think we secured that because we were a Bradford contractor rather than...

KL: Right.

VW: Which was good cos we've got our foot into a new client really.

KL: Yes. So do you tend to get invited to put in a tender then, or do you just look out for adverts or....you know before you put in a contract?

VW: It's mainly invited to get a tender. Err...that was for a company called Bam which we'd never worked for before, err, but Bradford have a, like a, not a, well a regeneration, and trying to provide work for Bradford companies, and they have various seminars. And we happened to be there when Bam were and it just clashed and it worked. They were looking to...for someone to do the roofing works and we were looking to join...

KL: So Bam is...is that?

SN: It's a big company isn't it?

KL: Right.

VW: Yeah, it used to be Nuttall and Yarwood and it's undergone changes over the years.

SN: Are they local as well?

VW: They have a regional office in Leeds.

SN: Right ok.

KL: So you were subcontracting to...Bam?

VW: ...to Bam, yeah.

KL: And they were working...

VW: For the YMCA.

KL: Right ok. And you think you got that because you were local.

VW: Local and in Bradford.

KL: Because they were required to...

VW: ...employ....

KL: ...subcontract to local...

VW: ...people, yes.

KL: ...companies and employ local people.

KL: when they put their bid in to the YMCA, it would have probably been part of the criteria, tender criteria that they employ some local labour and companies that employ, apprentices and things like that. So yeah it can become very, err, technical how...

KL: Yes. I mean are there quite a lot of these sort of hoops and things? You know, I mean it's not just work.

VW: ...work...

KL: And price. How much other stuff, you know, kind of comes into the decision?

VW: It's getting more and more because people get funding from various bodies and it relates on...it's like the training groups, you've gotta get people to do so much for you to get that funding. And that will have been kind of...

KL: So what other kinds of things might there be apart from say local...what other hoops or...without sounding, I'm putting a negative turn on it there! Shouldn't do that. What other kind of requirements?

VW: Well they're looking for people to be local, they're looking that people are trained to a level, and that the people that...the companies that they're working for give them training, and that the develop...quite often apprentices are a key thing cos they're looking for people to come in and be skilled within the area. Because there was something in the press last week about erm I don't think it was Yorkshire Forward, but they were in Leeds, saying that they've got this new arena work going on but they can't get construction workers to...to work.

KL: Whose funding that? Is that erm public or is that private?

VW: That's a public one isn't it? The new arena.

SN: It might have some public funding.

KL: That's what I was thinking yes. And they couldn't get...

VW: They were claiming that they couldn't get construction workers.

SN: That they couldn't recruit?

VW: That they couldn't recruit.

KL: Even in this climate.

VW: Now I find that very hard to believe, and I haven't dug right it. I am slightly skeptical about it and it's probably, they're saying they can't get labourers because they probably can't get them to work for the price that they want to pay them. And obviously that's why they're not attracting people. But, 'round and about there are more skilled workers than there are jobs.

KL: There are more skilled workers...

VW: ...skilled workers.

KL: Is that just sort of at the current time...

VW: I think at the current...

KL: ...or is that something that's been evident for quite a number of years?

VW: No, no it's changed. Three years ago, yeh, there were., there was more work than there were skilled people. And they was trying to get people to come in. And it's like the amount of people that all looked at going into plumbing, after the said 'yes', plumbers were on £70k a year. The amount of people that retrained.... Erm, but there hasn't been the work to keep people going, and we've had the same kind of....decisions and, sorry decisions to make. Because you can't take an apprentice on if you're putting people on short time.

SN: No.

VW: So you need that level of work to be able to keep your workforce going and to train somebody as well.

KL: So is that making the competition for these contracts...are you noticing it's much harder to get work?

VW: It can be yes, yeh. I mean we used to a lot of schools, but all schools now don't have any natural materials. Their all gone down the PFI line, and a company will come in and produce you a school for X. It'll be just a modern box.

KL: So you haven't been involved in any of those.

VW: No, because they don't put slates on. Because...

KL: Right.

SN: But there must be some schools that need refurb...I mean it goes back again to the heritage thing doesn't it, but there must be some historic schools that need reroofing.

VW: Reroofing. And yes we have done quite a few of them year, providing the schools don't sell up and build themselves a new school, and you end up with the old school then as an empty building...until somebody comes and takes it on for housing or offices or...

SN: I'm quite interested in erm the relationships you have with erm the councils and things like that, er and how kind of your work on the housing stock links to your heritage work, and whether you think working in one area might help you get work in another area? And if you're...do you ever do anything like the framework contract?

VW: We have our...seen various bits about the framework erm and there again these are all partnering arrangements and so these companies go in erm, but it's not something we have developed an awful lot because...if we were trying...we always do try and look more to the heritage side of things, to try and get more work that way, so that's kind of where we trying to expand more, and we have to take the other type of work on, just to keep everybody fully employed. Erm, yes we do get dragged in a little bit but not to a great extent with the framework stuff, because it depends on the type of buildings that they're providing.

SN: Right, so for each project you tender independently?

VW: Yes.

SN: Right ok, interesting.

VW: I mean we do tend to work, and price for most of the major contractors within, well definitely within Yorkshire and erm Greater Manchester area as well.

SN: Right.

KL: Do you find that when you're putting in these contracts, erm they're pretty similar in terms of what they ask of you? Erm, you know, are you always having to submit the same information? Or, you know is it getting easier or harder to...

VW: It's getting harder yeah there's more paperwork in the middle. Err and various people have different twists and things. I went to pre-contract meeting a couple of weeks ago and they said 'your men will all have to where hi-viz pants, and they will have to be flame retarded'. And you're, right., why? That's just the criteria, that's the standard that they've set.

KL: And so, who kind of does that work? Is it you that works on that? Do you spend a lot of time of bits of paperwork?

VW: It varies a little bit. Fionn tends to look after the, Fionn being my brother, as we run it as a family company, Fionn looks after the enquiries and the tenders, I tend to look after the live contracts, when we've got the orders, so then there is a little bit in the middle where we both kind of work together, but we can both do each others job being a small

company. So, if there's any pre-qualification things, Fionn tends to deal with that. And, we, in theory we're part of like CHAS, and that's supposed to help people with pre-qualifications, but it doesn't because every company still has their own little different forms and you've got to fill them in.

SN: Is CHAS a health and safety?

VW: Yes. What does it stand for? Construction Housing err Accreditation Scheme I think.

SN: And, I mean, do you ever...you prefer working in the heritage sector and I'd like to know why that is.

VW: We...the whole quality of working is far better.

SN: Right.

VW: When you get, like a new office block, it's very commercial driven. They've got very tight deadlines erm, with big penalties on if they don't hit those deadlines. And quite often you'll find that the quality of the job just disappears out the window, and it's just head down and banging on. Whereas heritage work, not only are we quite often going to some nicer places to work, but th, the projects are more interesting. The roofs erm are not straightforward...

SN: ...challenge...?

VW: And they're more challenging. And the workforce enjoy that challenge to a certain extent. They'd much rather do something like that and also they'd much rather do something where their work is appreciated rather than as soon as you roll onto site they want you off site. And, you work with better materials, rather than just going for the cheapest tile, the cheapest slate, erm, a lot of the churches, if they get the grants, they're using new Welsh slate, and it's nice to work with.

SN: Erm, and so, is that all public sector funded heritage work? Have you done any work in the private sector?

VW: Erm well I suppose...it all depends what you call public and private...

SN: ...the church work...

VW: Because lots of, certain churches will look for heritage, sorry for Lottery funding...

SN: English Heritage as well don't they...?

VW: And English Heritage funding. So that's kind of on the public side but they're a standalone...

SN: So kind of, even though it's run by private organisation, they are, they kind of have to, you know, tick the public sector boxes don't they?

VW: Yeah.

SN: So, that's quite interesting. And again you have to go through a tender process and things like that don't you?

VW: That's it. They you know, the client, well depending what the scheme involves.

SN: And with the church work do you normally contract directly to the diocese?

VW: Err we have connections with the Catholic diocese in Leeds. And the, we've done a bit on the Methodist side, err but that quite runs out of York somehow.

SN: They've got funny, Diocese are funny, especially the Wakefield one. I'm not sure if it's Methodist or Anglican.

VW: And I lose track of sometimes where the centres are. But we have worked direct for most denominations.

SN: You don't normally subcontract on those projects?

VW: We do yes. More than...

SN: Oh to the main contractor?

VW: Yes. 9 times out of 10 we would work on a church subcontract.

SN: To the stonemason normally?

VW: Or the main contractor.

SN: Right ok.

VW: Yeh. And they would be to a specific heritage contractor. Rather than a general builder.

SN: Right ok.

VW: Cos I don't think a lot of peo....general contractors can't get their head round heritage. They just think they can treat it as a commercial contract and just blaze away, and you can't do that. It was done in a way, a style, that was done many years ago, and people want to preserve that. Erm, that's what they can't get their heads round.

KL: So do you find you're doing erm sort of contract work for often the same main contractor the, for the heritage work? Or are there lots of them around?

VW: There are...there's a group...there is kind of a sma...well, it's not a large market on heritage contractors. But quite often, and really the architects are at fault if they then try and bring, shall we say, a general commercial contractor to tender for something. Erm, and you know it's wrong for his client really.

KL: The architects seem to be quite key in a lot the of heritage work.

VW: Mmm.

KL: People keep mentioning them to us. I mean do you have, you know, sort of particular relationships with some of the architects that you obviously try and promote I suppose...yourself to them?

VW: Well we do. There are kind of quite a few heritage architects that we do quite a lot of work. And quite often sometime they will have in their tender documents 3 or 4 roofing contractors, cos they can't say, just go...

SN: No.

KL: Yes, so they still have to...they have to be seen to be going through the process.

VW: Yeh. Erm but you know if you've...there's one in Leeds, sorry Manchester, called Lloyd Evans Pritchard, and we've worked a lot of years. And he's very demanding on what he wants.

SN: Oh really?

VW: Yeh. So, he won't just have any roofing contractor, so he has a list of 3 or 4 there. And it's the same with the lead work. He has 3 or 4 lead workers that he's happy that know what he wants, how he wants it, erm that he will work with.

SN: And do you tend to agree with his standards? You don't ever...

VW: We have quite a few discussions.

(Laughter)

SN: Really?

VW: Well....it's...

SN: But you feel like you can have that. I mean that's important isn't it?

VW: Well it is yes, you know. Because someone says 'well you only...you only argue whenever you, he asks you', I says 'yes, but by the time we meet, there's a problem to sort out'.

SN: Yes.

VW: So, but yes, we always, you know, he gets the quality of work that he wants at the end of the day. And we, we eventually end up at a compromise to how it needs to be done.

SN: Right ok.

KL: And, how do you find working as a subcontractor, mainly in heritage side...

VW: ...heritage side...

KL: ...do you find that it's quite straightforward, or are there problems?

VW: It, it is more straightforw....there are problems, but they're interesting problems to sort out and it's usually cos you've taken something off and you've unearthed something and it's kind of as people pictured it should've been and then it's sorting that out. So, you know, those are kind of nice problems, the other problems are usually kind of access and egress type problems, like most churches might be stuck in a churchyard somewhere, where you've got to walk all the materials in, err.

KL: Yeah.

VW: But it is more enjoyable. The...a lot of the heritage contractors don't tend to be as bureaucratic as if you work for part of like the main contractors, you know, they've this, this, this and this. So, yes it tends to be a little bit more informal, a lo...little bit more relaxed...

KL: This is heritage work?

VW: Heritage work.

KL: But not specifically sub...as a subcontractor?

VW: Well even as, well yes as a subcontractor to a heritage contractor is a little bit more relaxed, not as bureaucratic.

KL: Right.

VW: And, er, easier working systems on site.

SN: Do you think that's cos of the size of the companies, they tend to be smaller so their not quite so caught up in the whole kind of figures and you know, cos big companies have a massive responsibility to not have injury on site don't they?

VW: Yeah.

SN: You know they're, it's the big...if you're a fe...if want an apprenticeship as a, well I've heard colleges tutors say that a lot of big companies take on female apprentices because there's certain figures that the government is aiming to achieve...

VW: ...achieve...

SN: and stuff that like.

VW: females into construction...

SN: Yeah, absolutely. So I'm just thinking that maybe it's because of the size of them.

VW: Yes, well I don't think, I don't know that there's a national heritage contractor. Erm, what was it? There was one Manchester way that was quite big...errm oh, the name escapes me. But most heritage contractors do tend to be on a smaller scale and they're more used to working in a specific area, a geographic area, erm and they obviously know a lot more the styles, and the materials. Cos they've got stonemasons they know where they can get that stone, where that stone's come from.

SN: Do you think that kind of local knowledge is important for heritage?

VW: Yeah. Because otherwise if you've got somebody that's come up from the Midlands or wherever that's running the job, there's no real...

SN: They wouldn't know the first thing about where to get a Yorkshire stone slate from, would they?

VW: No. No, so they don't... A little bit I think, well maybe more so from my side, is to know the geography of the area that you live.

SN: What do you mean like the geology?

VW: Well I'm not a great geologist but you know that Halifax used to have a load of quarries, you know where the quarries were and everything and you know where that stone is. And you tell the difference of stone this side of the hill and the Lancashire stone. And even then when you start going up into the Dales it's a different stone again.

SN: Right, ok. So, for, as well as finding materials it's also, local knowledge helps you understand the site you're working on as well?

VW: Yeah.

SN: Right ok. That's interesting, I'm quite interested in the kind of, the economic activity that conservation generates.

VW: Yeah.

SN: So, you know, by working on a local building you're engaging certain local materials suppliers and things like that, so it's quite interesting.

VW: Yeah. Linford's was the name of the biggest...

KL: Yes.

SN: They were West Midlands. They were the biggest yeah.

VW: Yeah, yeah. I'm not sure whether they're still about.

SN: No, they went bust about six weeks ago.

VW: Was it?

KL: Yeah

SN: Yeah.

KL: Fairly recently...

SN: It was recent. I think probably Firm16GB's are one of the biggest now, Firm15SM. But they've both gone, cut right down haven't they?

VW: Yes. Firm16GB's and us ahhh have separated.

SN: Really?

VW: Yeah.

SN: Oh right.

VW: It...basically they've got their own roofing team now.

SN: OK...Right.

VW: And that's all I shall say.

SN: That's interesting.

VW: But I don't think they...changing style of management as well and I don't think they're as revered as they used to be.

SN: No., no. Well hopefully we are gonna interview Firm16GB's and I think they're a company that's sort of a bit mysterious at the moment, so...

VW: They are to a lot of people!

SN: I know Ian really well and we've worked together on the NHTG type stuff quite a lot, but yeah, I don't really understand the company very well. But they've definitely had a change of management. Ian is the...he used to be the...it's Ian Clifford...

VW: One of the sons, I was err....obviously a family company, and...well you know more...

SN: Absolutely. Well I think there was a bit of a boardroom coo about 10 or more years ago and now I think the style of management's changed quite a lot. And they are getting more involved in new build and things like that now aren't they, so. Interesting...

KL: Can we just go back to the subcontracting?

VW: Yeah.

KL: If we could just...on, at a more general level, and specifically heritage, erm, I mean do you find it makes a big difference in terms of the control you have, the decision making, erm do you get paid on time. You know, what are the kind of challenges of subcontracting?

VW: Well, yeah, payment's a very important one these days cos margins are a lot tighter, but you do find, no you don't have as much control. A lot will depend on the contractor you're working with because, depending, you're probably not brought into the decision making as much as you would be if it was erm, in lot of ways heritage, cos if there was a problem they'd way 'look we're having a site meeting, do you think you could turn up for half an hour when the architect's on site, we can run through these problems you've got'. On the other more general work side of things they wouldn't bring you into a site meeting at all. They would just make their commercial decision between them and the architect.

KL: And then just tell you...

VW: Yes. This is what's been...

KL: ...what was required.

(Pause)

KL: So how fixed is the detail in the specifications up front? You know, is there quite a bit of flexibility once you get going? Depending on what you find?

VW: On heritage or in...?

KL: Well, perhaps a contrast between, you know. Does it vary a lot then? Suppose...I imagine it's more likely to be flexible on heritage...

VW: It is, can be a lot more flexible. But the other side...it all depends on the architect and how clued up they are. But quite often on more of the commercial things it will be more black and white. 'We want this product, and this, we want this', because that's what they're delivering to their client. Whereas with the heritage work, erm, generally they're trying to get like-for-like. We're limited in a lot of ways because Welsh slates, we can only get certain Welsh slates. You know, Westmoreland slates, there aren't as many quarries as they used to be, I mean Burlington slate ties all the Lake District up, more or less. So you kind of, you do and you don't have the flexibility.

KL: Yes, so you're more constrained by material requirements and things like, like that.

VW: Yeah. We've just finished a church in Dewsbury, which is a Burlington slate, which had diminishing slate, like a stone slate, you get small ones at the top, big ones at the bottom. And we took one side off and put some totally new Burlington slate on. And they wanted the new slate to be similar sizes, whereas that wasn't made clear in the original specification.

KL: Right.

VW: And eventually we came up with a kind of a compromise. Cos you can't always get the length that they want.

KL: And I assume insurance is a big issue for contracts for you is it?

VW: Well yes...it costs us quite a bit of money and we tend to, the policies we have are through brokers that deal a lot with roofing companies. Erm, but I think it's...the industry gets a bad press for injuries and things like that, but well, run companies, we don't have, touch wood, we don't have a lot of accidents and claims. It's more the setting jobs and prelims.

KL: And have you stayed about the same size since you were set up?

VW: No, no, no. We grew, I mean obviously from...We did, I would think about the '80s, we were a reasonable steady size. And we grew a little bit then into about 2008, and we're smaller than we were then. We've lost about 5 teams.

KL: Since?

VW: Since 2008?

KL: Since 2008? So how many...what does that equate to? You say you've lost 5 teams.

VW: Most teams, most teams...most people come...if their experiences they'll come as a team because they know how to work with each other, and everyone has their own quirks of working. So a team develops that kind of bond over the years, and so if they leave someone you'll tend to find of both them do so they can work together. Erm, so yes it tends to leave as a team.

KL: So when you say you've lost 5 teams since 2008...

VW: Yeah.

KL: Is that because of lack of work?

VW: Yep.

KL: So they've been let go in effect.

VW: Yep (*quietly*)

KL: Right. And is that maybe...could you say that's down to losing sort of, or not getting as much heritage work, or the more commercial?

VW: Well it's a bit of both, it's spread across. I mean heritage work at the moment's down because the Olympics has taken a lot of the heritage funding.

KL: Yes, of course, yes.

VW: So we're hoping that hopefully maybe be next year we're gonna see a bit more return of a bit more heritage work coming back in.

KL: Right.

VW: Have you found that?

SN: No I think that erm quite a lot of companies think the same and they've found that their heritage work has fallen off, and it's the companies that are kind of spread, err you know, do a range of things...

VW: ...of things...

SN: ...like you, that have managed to survive. But, I mean, I think the figures speak for themselves. Like Linford's going bust, that's just amazing.

VW: Yeah.

SN: Because he, you know, he's really, really well respected, Simon Linford isn't he?

VW: Yes, yeah.

SN: And the way the company was run and everything. Erm, for heritage, so...I think it is difficult times. At first when they said, when all the funding, when it, 2008, when the recession started, people said 'oh well, you know heritage is the one thing that stays constant in a recession' because the work always needs doing. But I just don't think that's true and it really does demonstrate how much it relies on public sector funding. I mean when we talk about heritage people, well, you're instantly saying it's always contracts that involve the public sector. There's not really many individuals or homeowners that come to you and say 'oh we've got a heritage job'.

VW: No, they're very few and far between. Someone's bought a house that is, say a grade I listed building...

SN: Was Lendal Tower private? That's owned by some...I don't know if they had funding.

VW: I think, I don't think they had funding. I think it's privately owned.

SN: That was a heritage job. Sort of?

VW: Yeah.

SN: But he, I mean I know somebody that lives in one of the houses and he said that they, you know, had a massive budget for that, so...so there are few, there are a few private jobs like that, but in the main you think heritage you think is public sector funded.

VW: Yeah. So York is kind of a very big...you've got a mixture of things there because York's a place that people want to live, you know and that's an area, so there is a demand. But if you then take a house somewhere out in the country, you wouldn't look at it commercially the same way as people look at renovating buildings in York.

SN: Really?

VW: No, so..

SN: And erm, so do you kind of get involved with the conservation officers in York more than you would in other areas?

VW: I don't particularly because the jobs tend to be on a larger scale that the main contractor will deal with the conservation officer.

SN: Right.

VW: I mean I'd see them if they're round and about, but I couldn't tell you who they are.

SN: No.

VW: I've just met the one in Halifax cos we've done a, when I say gentleman's club, it was an old style club, not one that has girls on poles.

SN: No.

Erm, and it goes back many, many years, and they got so...well yeah they got a grant to do the work for that. We did that as main contractor cos they only had so much money they just did the roofing works.

SN: Right ok.

KL: Do you ever get together with other firms to put in a joint bid? Either firms that are sort of complementary in terms of the craft, so it might be a joiner or something, or with other roofers, just so you increase your capacity. Would you ever do that or consider it?

VW: It's something we'd con...we do a little bit on the more commercial work. We work for main contractors or small companies and someone'll come to us and say 'can you do us this and can you do that', which is a little bit out of our comfort zone, so we will then bring to do a specific task. Err, but some of the heri...on the heritage side, you do tend to get companies prefer also to work with people. And you build that relationship up and the people stay in heritage companies a lot longer than they do in a commercial company. Cos sometimes we will end up working for a company we've never done because the quantity surveyor has left and gone. Whereas the heritage companies tend to be small formed and close knit and people stay with them. Erm, it's like spinning back that...Linford's took over a company called S and J Whitehead many years ago, but a lot of people splintered out of S and J Whitehead. Tim Donlan who works for Firm16GB's came out of S and J Whitehead, there's a company called Loin and Smith, they came out of S and J Whitehead.

SN: Right.

VW: And there's one we work...Lambert and Walker, they came out. So, when a company changed, all these people set up on their own as small and they're building up. Cos well, Linford's have gone into liquidation, there'll be people that work there will set up own small heritage companies.

SN: And that's how...do you know Firm03SM stonemasons in York?

VW: Not off, no...

SN: We spoke to them a couple of weeks ago and that's what happened to them. They worked for Beeston, their York branch, before and I can't remember what the company was called that owned...?

KL: No.

SN: But they got rid of it and so they set up Firm03SM, on the same premises, you know, same...similar team, erm, yeah. And there they are now, so that was...

VW: Established, and that's how...but they will probably stick together...

SN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

VW: And there won't be many management changes in that, that group.

SN: No, I think that was just the two of them.

KL: Yeah.

VW: So people to tend to, they don't move 'round as much.

SN: Right.

KL: You said something about erm a moment ago, about being out of your comfort zone. Was that the nature of the work or the scale of the...

VW: Well nature and scale. If someone said can we come in and plaster the underside of the roof, that's something we couldn't do. So yes, we would then bring in a plasterer to do that for us.

KL: Yes, so you'd do that rather than not go for the job?

VW: Oh yes, yeah we would tend to try. That wouldn't put us off, no.

KL: Right ok. And would they then come in...you'd subcontract the work to them?

VW: They'd work to us as a, yeah, and we'd look after the job as a main contractor.

KL: Right. Do you ever go for anything as a kind of more equal partnership? You know, where you're going in with other small firms where you kind of err in a more of a sort of err horizontal relationship?

VW: We haven't particularly seen anything come off that way, but yes we wouldn't be averse if somebody wanted to look and say look 'we want to do this, we've got this you know, and bring three or four people in on an equal playing field'. You know.

KL: It just seems to be something that's talked about a lot, you know, at the moment, it's all, erm people saying small firms err you know, they can't cope with the capacity of a lot of contracts, therefore they should get together and form consortia and so on. But I haven't seen any evidence really of it happening...

VW: No I haven't...

KL: But there's a lot of talk about it.

VW: I think the problem also comes is architects don't particularly would like to work in that way because they like to go and speak to someone. If you've got say 4 different disciplines on a contract and then the architect's got to deal with each discipline individually, it becomes very...

KL: Yes, yes, yes.

VW: ...cumbersome and it could work against itself.

KL: Yes. So just better to have the main contractor to deal with.

VW: Yeah you need somebody in the lead, leader all pulling it together.

KL: Yeah, I never really thought of that, yes. That's a good point which I suppose is particularly relevant to this kind of construction, especially heritage type work.

VW: Yeah.

KL: Er, so anything else you wanted to...

SN: I've got only two things that really I picked up. One was about erm kind of motivation, motivating and how people prefer working on the heritage work cos it's challenging. Would you also say it's quite motivating?

VW: I think...yes, I think there is a little bit. But it's the nature of people that come and work for us. We've had people that come and work for us that don't like the way we work and the things that we do.

SN: Oh really?

VW: But that's human nature. We're all different and we all have different things and so I think, yes we attract the type of people to come and work with us that like to work in the style that we do.

SN: Right.

VW: And, yes I think they obviously like the style that we work in. I say that because a lot of them have worked for us a lot of years.

SN: Yeah. And when they work on, when you work on heritage sites do you tend to meet other companies that have a similar you know, kind of, what's the word, you know, character?

VW: Ethos?

SN: Ethos, yes.

VW: To kind of how we work...I think so yes. I mean the lads come across the join...whoever do the joinery work and they might do the pointing work, and the different, the stonemasons, we're working regularly with these people. They say these people regularly. But I do think it's kind of that atmosphere that they work in as well. A bit more relaxed, erm, you know they feel valued for being people. Yes, cos you talk about safety and the large contracting groups that have this zero tolerance to safety, but you're so kind of restricted in the ways that you work and thing, you can't do this and you can't do that, the restraints don't make the work as enjoyable.

SN: Right. That's interesting. Um and the other thing I was gonna ask you about is, you mentioned quality, and that the heritage work tended to be of a certain type of quality. Err and that's one of the things that makes it enjoyable, and again it goes back to this kind of the idea of the public sector, but do you see, do you see a lot of heritage work being done in a poor quality way that means you would then not want to be involved in the contract?

VW: Erm, you do to a certain extent. At the end of the day we can only advise a client if we're working direct for someone that we've just finished...somebody's renovating a public house that is a listed building and the conservation officer's involved.

SN: Mmm.

VW: She's, she's looking at it from a financial point of view all the time...

SN: ...the conservation officer is?

VW: No, the client is. So there is always a battle because the conservation officer wants it doing in a proper way with proper materials, whereas...and they do tend to cost more money. And she's looking at trying to do it for as cheap as she can. So yes, we end up with a conflict on it. But, I mean, half the time when we quote for the work we've spelt out how we're going to do it. If they got a alternative quote from somebody else that kind of fitted more into the way they wanted to work, then they would've gone with them on...to do a cheap, in out and away couldn't care less type of a job.

SN: OK. And that's a completely privately funded job?

VW: Yes.

SN: Right, OK.

VW: And it's probably also why we don't do a lot of domestic work, unless it becomes from a recommendation. On normal housing. Because somebody knows somebody in a pub somewhere that'll do it maybe without a scaffold, without the err health and safety that we do normally. But the that's their choice. They haven't got the come back either.

SN: No. And err, one last thing. When you are in a tendering pro...in a tendering situation, do you think erm that the idea of quality is something that's measurable? So, if you were tendering against a company...or something that gets measured...I mean if you were tendering against a company that might not do...you know...

VW: Do quite the same...I think that's very hard to measure at tender stage. Cos people can produce reams of paper and say we can do this and can do that. Quite often someone comes looking for the job; the person that says 'I've done this and I can do this and do this and this' isn't always as good as the quieter person that comes through the door, just gets on with the job.

KL: Just following up on that then, um, the tender stage obviously gets a lot of attention and a lot of focus, erm, what about the kind of, once the contract is under way, monitoring and the checking of quality. Does that happen...to what you might expect it? You know, i.e. making sure that people actually do what they've said they're going to do.

VW: Erm, well it does get done and the architects come 'round. The architects tend to be a lot more clued up I think with heritage work than they do normal commercial. Cos it's a specialism of architecture. And, and also I think they have a lot more interesting buildings as well. Erm, o yes, the architect will check 'round a lot more. To make sure he's getting what he expects and to the quality that he wants.

KL: But say, say if it was some work for a council or something that was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Would anybody who's actually paying out the money basically, the client, will they get involved at all in...?

VW: Not very often, erm because obviously ultimately they're employing the architect or erm, or a clerk of works to do that. So they say, they've got a picture of what they get and they expect it kind of to roll out and they're employing people. Unless you've got people that are in the group of, well it's like in Halifax where we've just done this the Albany

Club, it's owned by members and some of them are builders or what not, so yes they've had an interest to make sure that it's right. And, erm, look at the work. Some of it can be a bit, in a sense of sticking their nose in...

KL: Yes, you don't want everybody err monitoring your every move...

VW: Yeah, cos you'd never get anything done. But you know, it worked alright there.

KL: So usually though, it's through the architect or equivalent to do that kind of monitoring.

VW: Yeah. But the none heritage work, the big builders tend to have what they call these Quality Management Schemes and basically there all tick lists and you're supposed to sign off that you've checked it and done this and done that. So it tends to be formalized.

KL: Right.

SN: OK.

KL: Anything else that you think, that you'd like to add that we haven't...

VW: No, no, just if you've got any other questions later on, just give me a ring.

KL: That's great, thank you.

SN: Yeah, thank you very much.

Afterwards Vernon showed us around the yard where they store slates that they predict they will need in the future. This used to be a Council function (recommended in PPG15).

Pete Jones, Firm05CJ. November 21st 2011

SN: So...November 21st, Sophie Norton and Kim Loader with Pete...

PJ: Jones

SN: Jones at...

PJ: Firm05CJ

SN: Firm05CJ. Erm, yeah, so craft and conservation and how it links to the public sector.

PJ: Yeah.

SN: You know that I'm err quite interested in training and how people train, err...

PJ: Yeah.

SN: ...in conservation crafts. So I'm wondering first of all how you got to be where you are and how the other people in the company erm perhaps trained.

PJ: What? Just in conservation or in...

SN: No in...

PJ: ...trade.

SN: No I think you have to have a cr... a trade as well as conservation don't you?

PJ: Yeah, yeah. Erm. We're all City and Guilds trained.

SN: Right.

PJ: Simon and I, and erm Chad and Colin who work in the workshop.

SN: Uh huh.

PJ: They're trained. Chad was trained before he came to us and Colin was an apprentice we trained. Well he went to college and did City and Guilds and we trained on the job.

SN: Right.

PJ: As for conservation, we erm, sort of dropped into it by chance. Well I say...we did it, but we didn't really call it conservation.

SN: Mmm.

PJ: You know, most joiners to the sort of thing. Erm, it wasn't seen as anything special but we happened to get a job erm renovating a house in Thornton which is where the Bronte sisters were born.

SN: Right

PJ: And it was a listed building, erm and err the conservation officer just sort of liked our work and said 'you can go on the list'. And then Saltaire started happening. Grants came out, you know it's a World Heritage Site. *(Coughs)* 'scuse me. So it just sort of went on from there really.

SN: Right ok.

PJ: You know, you get to be known as people that do that kind of thing...

SN: Mm huh.

PJ: ...but as far as training goes, it's, it's just part of what used to be a general joinery course.

SN: Right.

PJ: I don't spose it is now, it's more modern stuff but you still do some elements.

SN: Yeah, that's right.

PJ: Although not all that many...

SN: I mean when, who, which was the one that trained with you? What's his name?

PJ: Colin.

SN: Colin. When did Colin go to college?

PJ: Oh his um, he must be, 26, 27, so 10, 11 years ago.

SN: Right. Ok.

PJ: And they did some traditional joinery. Not them not sliding sash windows.

SN: No.

PJ: Not fancy staircases or anything like that.

SN: No. Right ok. So it's just the 4 of you?

PJ: There's another one, Arthur. Works mainly on site, who isn't trained at all.

SN: Oh really?

PJ: Well he trained in Morocco.

SN: Right ok

PJ: And he ran a workshop in Morocco and he came over here and we took him on and sort of trained him up really into the kind of things that we do.

SN: Right. So the 4 of you are bench joiners...is that how you would refer to yourselves or not?

PJ: Well yeah, I spose we're all trained in that yeah.

SN: Right. But you do...you find that you do a lot of on site as well?

PJ: I don't do the chipping!

(laughter)

PJ: I go out on site sort of supervising the fitting of things that we make.

SN: Right, ok.

PJ: And erm Chad and Colin make most of the stuff...and Simon makes the appointments.

(Laughter)

PJ: No Simon does all the admin and also goes out as well.

SN: OK.

PJ: He helps out in here, and err, yeah that's it.

SN: Right. And so...

PJ: I might need training again actually. I might be forgetting everything...

SN: Well, if you don't...you don't do it! So you do a lot of repair of sash windows. Do you do repair as well as replace them?

PJ: We do repairs, yeah. Erm, we make a lot of new ones, but we do repairs yeah.

SN: And what about things like skirting and dados?

PJ: Yeah everything really.

SN: Doors and door frames?

PJ: Yeah, everything. Anything that you can't buy off the shelf really that's made of wood. Yeah skirting, you know, reproduce skirtings if you can't them anymore.

SN: Uh huh.

PJ: Dados and architraves. Yeah. Doors, staircases, The conservation part of it. Yeah. All kinds of things really.

SN: And when you like erm, you make the components don't you?

PJ: Yes.

SN: You run them...you're a workshop so you machine them?

PJ: Yeah everything yeah. Just get the wood, sawn wood, not the tree, we don't cut the trees down! And yeah we work from there.

SN: Do you do that for anybody else?

PJ: For other customers?

SN: For...other kin...maybe if a joiner came to you that didn't have his own workshop...

PJ: Yeah. Yes small joiners we do yeah.

SN: Right.

PJ: If people wanted a lot, you know, hundreds and hundreds of feet we'd send them somewhere else.

SN: Right.

PJ: We're not really equipped for that kind of thing.

SN: Right OK.

(Phone rings)

SN: Yes so we're talking about the kind of, type of, projects that you get involved with.

PJ: Well it varies...priv...listed stuffs...largely private individuals, you know that own the houses. Erm although it doesn't, it's not always, we've done some offices in a listed building earlier this year, in Bradford. Erm people were moving into it..and...errr... It was listed so all the windows had to be big sliding sashes and a big front door. Erm but conservations mainly, yeah domestic...I keep thinking we ought to put ourselves about a bit more because there must be other conservation work around. But we never do, we never get into it.

SN: You never work for like the local authority?

PJ: Well we do work through the local authority, yes we do every now and then. The museum service.

SN: Oh really?

PJ: Yeah, but not a lot.

SN: Mainly like maintenance and repair?

PJ: No, just erm, what do we do? No it's not conservation I spose...we make things for the industrial museum, you know, like replica machinery.

SN: Ohh.

KL: Oh right.

PJ: For education projects.

SN: Right, ok.

PJ: You know, they wanna show kids how pistons work on the machines.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

PJ: You know, changing ropes in motion to vertical or horizontal motion. That kind of thing.

KL: So very kind of one off projects then?

PJ: Yeah, yeah, lots of it's one off yeah. We don...well it's all sort of one...

KL: I spose it all is really...

PJ: Well you know, windows just vary in size really. The construction's the same but erm, yeah a lot of it's sort of one off really. So, erm, that's quite a lot of our work but it's not all of our work. You know, we do interiors of restaurants every now and then. Erm, houses, we're just doing a house in Bradford. Doing all the...a new house...erm, er but, not I often think we ought to write to English Heritage and National Trust, and people like that, saying what we can do and if they're anything's that needs doing they ought to, you know, give us a try. But never got 'round to it! Got some leaflets made but we never...

SN: Never sent them anywhere!

KL: So at the moment to people come to you looking...

PJ: Yeah, it's always been like that yeah.

KL: And is that just through word of mouth?

PJ: Yeah think so yeah

KL: Or through...do you do adverts...

No we don't do adverts no.

KL: So it's through word of mouth...

PJ: It always has been yeah. For 30 years now.

SN: How did I find out about you? The Conservation Officer at Huddersfield, or Kirklees.

PJ: No.

Deleted. Work our know each through Bradford Conservation Officer

SN: They had erm, they had a list of contractors that could work on heritage buildings...

PJ: Yes that's right, we're on that. We're on that list.

SN: Which they're not really supposed to have. You're on that list, so that's how I...

PJ: Well they're not...I think they're ok having the list, but what they're not supposed to do is recommend...

SN: Recommend.

PJ: But they do.

SN: It's how the terminology...it's how you term it isn't it?

PJ: Yeah. I think, cos we've done it for years and years, and I know, I know Saul pretty well....he knows...

KL: So how did you get into that work in the first place? Was that again through...

PJ: That was as I explained to you, that first job that we did for erm Bronte birth place. And because it was a listed building the con...I think they were giving them a grant, they gave grants in those days

KL: Yeah, yeah.

PJ: And I think they needed to come and have a look at the work and see that it was, you know approve it, see that it was up to scratch. The conservation officers.

KL: Yeah, so I mean er, that's going back a long time then is it?

PJ: It is yeah.

KL: To the first job. But that job would you've got that job competitively against other firms or...

PJ: I guess so, I don't know, it was....erm so yeah, we had to put a price in. And most people were getting other price...I can't remember. But we got the job anyway.

KL: And that's just led on to...

PJ: And then they put us on the list and then more jobs and then, you know, once they know that they get a contractor that they don't have to sort of chase, that they can trust, it's easy for them isn't it?

SN: Yeah.

PJ: They can sort of pass it on and know that it'll be done properly.

SN: So with the world heritage site work, you said there was grants for that.

PJ: There used to be yeah, not any more, not in Saltaire.

SN: When there was, did you have to put a price in for that as well?

PJ: Yeah.

SN: Yeah.

PJ: Oh yeah, we always have to put a price in. Erm yes, a price to the customer, the householder, and then it was approved by, they said yes 'we'll have it' and then the conservation team gave them, it was 70% they used to get. To start with, then it went down and down and now it's nothing.

SN: Now it's nothing, interesting.

KL: That was always 70% of your quote? Whatever your quote...

PJ: Well you know, within reason. You know, if we'd have doubled it I don't think we'd have stayed...

KL: Yes that's right, yes.

PJ: But erm...

KL: As long as it was...

PJ: Yeah, reasonable, which it always was.

SN: I was gonna say you've never been asked to price for any like local authority managed work? Apart from the museum stuff.

PJ: Yeah occasionally they send stuff through, you know, we're on their list of approved contractors. But there's nothing very interesting, you know. Although...I think the last one we quoted for was Shipley Town Hall.

SB: Right.

PJ: Which was dozens and dozens of windows and I think we weren't very competitive because we're not geared up to do, you know, tons and tons and tons of stuff. We're more geared up for a small batch of individual things.

KL: Mmm.

SN: Mm...do you know how many windows there were at Shipley?

PJ: I think there must've been about 50 or 60 or something.

SN: Right OK.

PJ: Although, you know, we do 20s and 30s.

SN: Mm.

PJ: But they weren't, they weren't, it wasn't a listed building. They were just sort of bog standard things.

SN: Oh right, ok.

KL Oh right so...

PJ: They got them from the manufacturer, thinking about it, and then got a price cos they wanted fitting.

SN: Right ok.

PJ: I think it was probably cheaper that way.

KL: Right.

PJ: And I don't think we really wanted to do it. Wasn't interesting.

SN: Right ok. And when you kind of give a price, do they give you a response?

PJ: Erm, no I don't think they did no. If you don't...if they're not gonna give you the work, they just, they ignore you really. Give a response to the people that they're gonna employ.

SN: Right ok.

PJ: But that's standard really.

SN: Right.

KL: So when you say that you keep thinking that you ought to, you know, be putting your name out there a bit more, is that just so you can be a bit more selective about the sort of work or do you want to build up the volume?

PJ: No, don't want to do that.

(Laughter)

PJ: No, I think, yeah cos there might be more interesting stuff, you know. You know they do, we did quote once for some work at Harewood House, but it was new stuff, you know, they were fit....I don't know how they got in touch with us. It was new stuff, they were, you know, fitting out the cafe and things like that.

KL: Oh yeah.

PJ: And the sort of erm shop erm, but it were quite nice work. Yeah, you know, you see all these grand listed buildings, you think, when you go 'round, you think 'that's nice work, I wonder if they ever get anything like that done'. We could do that.

SN: Yeah.

PJ: Roberts Park erm in Saltaire, they were doing it up and that included some work on listed buildings but the contractors....I think they'd given it to a big contractors and they had their own people, you know.

SN: Mmm.

PJ: Er, so. Yeah it's something we've talked about, but, but we've n...

SN: Haha...

PJ: You just get caught up in responding to what you do.

KL: Yes, yes.

SN: Mmm.

PJ: Erm, you know, do...doing work.

KL: Yes. So you're mainly working directly to cl, with, or for clients?

PJ: Yes.

KL: Or rather through another contractor?

PJ: Mainly yes. Oh we do some work for builders, but we try and avoid it really. Don't always, builders've, you know, getting your money.

KL: Right, so that'd be the main reason. Just slow payments?

PJ: Yeah. Yeah cos, you know, there's a delay to get their money from the client and they've got other subcontractors to pay out to, so you... A couple of builder have gone bust and not paid us.

SN: Oh really?

PJ: That's nothing unusual in this trade, you know.

SN: Are they private jobs as well?

PJ: Erm, it was er it was on the Harewood house estate. A listed building. Erm, one of the farmhouses. The builder got the contracts in to do all this work and we were making windows, but we didn't get paid because he went bust. But, it wasn't all that much money. It didn't sort of...*(muffled)*

KL: But still, yeah.

PJ: So we do stuff for builders yeah. Builders come in, they want something making but, you know, we'll make it, they'll fit it. But you know, just the odd window or the odd staircase or something like that.

SN: So you do a lot of staircases and a lot of windows?

PJ: Erm, yeah, we do a fair few. We do a lot of windows yeah. And we do staircases yeah. It varies, sometimes you'll be doing quite a few and then you don't get one for ages. And then erm, but we've always windows on the go.

KL: But, but not just sash windows.

PJ: No, casements and...but it's mainly sash windows.

KL: Oh right, is it?

PJ: Yeah.

SN: Cos of Saltaire?

PJ: Well Saltaire and other listed buildings.

KL: Right, so, so is a lot of your work then on listed buildings? Would you say that's kind of the majority?

PJ: Yeah. More than half I'd say.

KL: More than half, yeah. And, and so would you...so that's a specialism really?

PJ: I spose it is yeah, yeah.

KL: So are there many others around that are competing for that sort of work?

PJ: No I don't think there are no. *(Coughs)*

KL: Against you?

PJ: I don't think there are no. In Saltaire there's only one other person and he's , he's even older than me. And he erm he's just one person I think and he makes them in errr, he's got a tiny workshop, and he gets someone else to fit them. And I think he does a few. But I think we've got a lot of work from him because people get fed up with waiting.

KL: Right.

PJ: Cos he's just on his own you know, does what he wants to do. And I don't know of anybody else in Saltaire.

SN: So you've done a fair few of the houses in the world heritage site then?

PJ: Oh god loads yeah.

SN: What about the other ones like the bigger ones, like the mill? Erm what's it called? Salt's Mill.

PJ: Salt's Mill? No nothing there.

SN: That's part of a bigger contract?

PJ: Well they don't do anything there. They did it up years ago when Jonathan Silver bought it, you know the Hockney gallery.

SN: Oh ok.

PJ: And they did repairs. I don't think they did anything new. It was a repaired refit, painted it, whatever they do. They sort of stripped the walls...have you been?

SN: I haven't no. I want to.

KL: Not for a long time.

PJ: It's good.

SN: Is it?

PJ: Yeah, yeah. They did it nicely. Hockney exhibition there at the minute.

SN: Ok.

PJ: Yeah, so we've done yeah loads in Saltaire. I'd say oh, well we've been doing it 20 years, hundreds we must've done.

KL: And is that quite a steady flow of work? Or is it sort of...

PJ: Yes it's always coming through yeah.

KL: Right.

PJ: I've just come back from there now.

KL: Right, right And that's likely to continue?

PJ: I guess so yeah. You know, there's still lots to do. People like to put them back or... Yeah, it's, it's kept its value up, you know, it's a place where people want to live. Erm, younger people, professional people, you know. There's a train service to Leeds and it's a nice, you know it's down by the river and by the canal, you know.

KL: How big is it? I mean what sort of number of houses are up there? Do you know?

PJ: God, thousands...

KL: I'm just, you might have...is there really? Thousand?

PJ: Yeah, well it's a whole village. You know, laid out in this, a grid pattern. For his workers. Yeah, so there's plenty to go at!

KL: Well that's what I'm just thinking, how long that can keep you err, keep you going.

PJ: By the time we've done 'em all the first ones'll be starting to get rotten.

Laughter

PJ: I don't know

KL: So what's the kind of limit for how far you might travel for work? You mentioned Harewood House. Which is a bit further than Saltaire.

PJ: Oh god. Yeah well, no we go erm it's mainly 'round about Bradford, Leeds, Halifax. Erm, Dewsbury, Skipton, out that way.

KL: Oh right.

PJ: So...and Manchester, we've worked in Manchester a few times. Erm and we've done a restaurant in the middle of Manchester. Erm...

KL: I would've thought that's quite unusual, you getting a job like that.

PJ: Yeah, it was. It's just through contacts. An Asian, Indian restaurant...there was loads of them in Bradford and they opened a branch...

KL: Right.

SN: Oh so you've done the windows for the company here?

PJ: No it wasn't windows no, it was the whole interior.

SN: Oh right. That makes it more worthwhile travelling that far?

PJ: Yeah it does. I wouldn't do it again, it's far.

SN: Oh really?

PJ: Well it is for me. I was young and fit.

KL: Would you travel each day?

PJ: Yeah we did on that motorway, it's horrible.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

PJ: Um, yeah, it's, you know, if there's an accident or something you're stuck. So it's an hour if you're lucky. An hour and a half, two hours if you're not. You know, the beginning and the end of each day, it's too tiring.

KL: Yeah. Makes it a long day doesn't it.

PJ: But I mean there are big firms that do this sort of thing all the time aren't there? Shop fitting, interiors and that. They just send in a load of young lads up and put them in a cheap hotel and just work, you know, none stop and go out and get drunk and up early. And, you know, carry on. Not my cup of tea!

KL: They can cope like that, yeah.

PJ: We're doing a job in London actually, shortly. I mean it's silly really but they're willing to pay for it. That was through someone that we know that does leaded lights. There's an exhibition and these people booked 'em and then said did you know someone (*muffled*) ...a fancy doorframe, and a canopy over, you know nothing special. Anyway we ended up doing it.

KL: I was gonna ask you about doors actually. Do you do....do quite a bit of, well I spose the surrounds as well as the doors?

PJ: Doors and frames, yeah.

KL: Yeah.

PJ: Yeah.

KL: And is that mainly more kind of the older, heritage

PJ: Yeah, old stuff yeah. I mean not necessarily listed buildings but older buildings and the people that want to reproduce what, you know, what it was like when it was...

KL: Yes.

PJ: When it was first made.

KL: Yeah.

SN: And what you said earlier about, sort of, you'd like to work on that because it's more interesting

PJ: Yeah it is yeah.

SN: So do you think heritage work in general is more interesting than...

PJ: Yeah. A lot of it is yeah.

SN: Why?

PJ: Why...it's...I spose it's proper joinery. You know, you know, you reproduce all the mouldings and that and get 'em just right.

SN: Mmm.

PJ: You know, it's quite complicated, once you, you know, once you get into it.

SN: Uh huh.

PJ: Making...you know, if you get it just right. You see lots of people that do it...

SN: Bodge it?

PJ: Not necessarily bodge it, it might be structurally ok, but just, just the small details, you know, the type of mouldings that you put on.

SN: Mmm.

PJ: And the depth of it and the width of it. It makes all the difference.

SN: Uh huh. So is that when you're copying, like copying a whole architrave? Or just replacing part of an architrave?

PJ: Yeah.

SN: Both?

PJ: Well, yeah a com, well making, making....No if you're just replacing it you'd, you know, just copy what's there, it's easy.

SN: Mmm.

PJ: But if you've got to, you know, put something, you know, like someone's had it, it's been changed 50 years ago and they want to put it back to how it was 150 years ago, then you know, you get your reference books out and or you know, available, you know, it's just erm appeals to my aesthetic senses.

SN: OK. So in that situation you're sort of designing something new, but in the style of...

PJ: Yeah sort of yeah. Yeah it is if you want to break it down yeah there's a lot of design involved.

SN: Yeah.

PJ: Erm, there is. You know, were you to analyse it all.

SN: Yeah.

PJ: It..it, yeah there's lots of different elements to it. But because you do it all the time you don't, you don't think about it like that. Erm, we probably don't charge for it!

KL: Well yeah, yeah.

PJ: You know cos design's the most difficult part really.

SN: Yeah.

PJ: You know, the actual execution of it is, once you've got the skills, that's sort of straightforward. But...

KL: So you'd advise your customers to try it's about what would be the appropriate ...

PJ: Yeah, it's 'have that' or 'don't do that' or 'I wouldn't have that'...

KL: But you're talking there about the aesthetics of something...

PJ: That's right yeah.

KL: Yeah.

PJ: Yeah.

KL: It's not, not just the work involved.

PJ: Well you know, things change don't they. You know, you see all kinds of styles and to most people they might not be different, but they do (*takes out book*). You know, glazing and the type of doors, changes from Victorian to Edwardian, not very much but you can definitely tell the difference.

KL: Mmm.

PJ: So you get to know it. I mean it's mainly Victorian stuff 'round here.

KL: Right.

PJ: You know, nothing, you know, the odd Georgian stuff but not very much, no.

KL: So all this side...sorry you should be asking this sort of question...

SN: No, no, no

KL: All this side of it is that sort of self taught, that kind of...

PJ: Yeah.

KL: And is that something that all the staff would be involved in?

PJ: No, no, just me and Simon.

KL: You...

PJ: No what they want is a drawing.

KL: Right OK.

PJ: That they can work to.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

PJ: Yeah, yeah. No, they're not great at err...oh they can be. At times. Makes suggestions at times, you know, but they prefer to have a, you know, for me or Simon to have worked it out and say 'make it like this'. That sort of how it works.

SN: Right. Do you do hand drawings them for them?

PJ: Yeah I do. Simon uses the computer.

SN: Does he?

PJ: Yeah, yeah. Erm, but no I do hand drawings.

SN: and do you think...why do you think that they're not so interested in the design thing?

PJ: It's easier.

SN: Pardon.

PJ: It's easier.

SN: To not be interested?

PJ: It's easier to make something, you don't have to make those decisions.

SN: Right.

PJ: You know, they come to work to make, you know. They like it, erm, and as I say occasionally they will, you know, they s...it takes along time to develop that sort of sense of...especially if you're not,...you know, I've always been interested in architecture. And art. But if you're not especially, you know, if you just wanna...you're interested in making things...might not give it a try. But they might say 'I don't think that works right, do it like this'. Well they do quite often actually, but that's usually a technical thing.

SN Oh OK.

PJ: If I want something to look like that they say 'you can't really', you know we can talk about it and work it out but, but erm, you know, in terms of, you know, what it might look like altogether they're not quite so interested.

SN: See I would've that that you would know what was technically possible or not.

PJ: Well I do most of the time but you know I don't, I'll leave a lot of it up to them, you know. Because they know as well as I do how to make things and maybe occasionally something might not, you know, might not work out and we might have to look at it and do it a different way, you know. There's lots of different ways of doing things, there's not just one way. So we might have to sort of look at it and 'I'll do it like that' to achieve the same effect.

SN: Right.

KL: So, sorry coming in again and it's really more your area, does the materials make a difference as to how you might do something?

PJ: Erm...

KL: I don't know, are there traditional materials for what you do, and...

PJ: It's mainly soft wood. For windows and erm, well no doors are often hardwood. We tend to steer away from tropical hardwoods, or try and steer people away if that's what they want. Oak, we've used. Erm, but in terms of the listed building stuff, you know windows and doors, you can make 'em equally in softwood and hardwood.

KL: Right ok.

SN: Do you use softwood at the moment?

PJ: Softwood, yeah.

SN: For windows? Right OK. Yeah, cos, I thought some of the softwood that you buy now has been grown so quickly that it rots dead fast.

PJ: Some of it has, yeah. You have to get the best stuff, yeah.

SN: Where do you get that from?

PJ: Various timber merchants. You specify, you know, (*muffled*), Russian (*muffled*), Swedish (*muffled*). You know, they'll ring up and say I've got some that's really, you know, some good stuff in, do you want it?

SN/KL: Mmm.

PJ: And if we need some at the time, we will yeah. But it needs to be treated, it all needs to be treated, softwood.

SN: Right.

PJ: You know, against rot, insect deterrent.

SN: Right ok.

PJ: Yeah, it used...it's not so much it's grown so quickly, although I'm sure it is, it's that they used, they used to discard a lot of it when it was a lot cheaper, when the Victorians were making it. So they'd use the heartwood and the sapwood outside would be discarded. And sapwood's more susceptible to rot. And now they use everything, in fact you can get it with bark on sometimes.

Laughter.

SN: Really?

PJ: Yeah.

SN: So the wood comes from allover, just depends on where the best wood is?

PJ: Well the soft usually comes from Scandinavia and Russia.

SN: OK

PJ: Hardwoods, temperate hardwoods like oak and ash and beech and that come from Europe and North America.

KL: Is that expens...much more expensive.

PJ: Yeah, they're more expensive hardwoods, yeah.

KL: And does that make a difference therefore as to which to use?

PJ: Yes that's right. Well depending on, if people say they want hardwood then I'll give 'em a choce of, you know, what the difference is, the difference in cost. It's quite a lot. And a lot of listed stuff has to be painted anyway; they can't have it stained, you know, so nobody knows whether it's hardwood or softwood underneath.

KL: Right.

PJ: You know, if you were using oak you want to keep it, it's nice to...

KL: Yes, yes.

PJ: But if you're gonna be painting it, you know, unless you really want to pay the extra.

KL: Mmm.

PJ: It happens, but not often.

SN: What about the timber merchants, where are they based?

PJ: Around and about. Huddersfield. Leeds. Bradford. Erm, Halifax. Yeah. They import stuff.

SN: Yeah. But there's not much English timber?

PJ: No, there's English softwood, well it's mainly Scottish I think. Gets used for structural work, like house building.

SN: Right, like roof rafters and things like that.

PJ: Yeah, cos it's not such great quality, but it's structural OK. It's graded, for it's purpose. But it's no good for joinery, it's too soft.

SN: Right.

PJ: And there's erm, no there isn't much English. If we use oak, we usually use European oak instead of American, because it's nicer. English oak, you can get it, but not much of it. And it's not as, it doesn't grow as big as European sort of forests, so you know, you can't get wider boards, it's not as economical. And noone asks us, well occas...we made a bus shelter for an artist in English oak. He wanted, it had to be English oak. Four sided bus shelter.

KL: That's an intriguing one!

PJ: Yeah, it was a good job actually. He had an exhibition, he wanted us to make this bus shelter.

KL: Oh I see right. So it wasn't going to function as...I was thinking why would...it was actually a piece of art.

PJ: Yeah, it was a piece of art, yeah. Full size bus shelter made in English oak you know. We had to replicate the nuts and bolts and everything. With erm broken glass, you know, smashed glass, smashed glass sandwiched between two sheets of glass. So it looked as if it was smashed. Full size, bigger than this room. It was a good job.

SN: Unique?

PJ: Well yeah, like all things like that. But it was yeah, nice bloke actually. They just have the idea really don't they? Conceptual art? Get somebody else to make it.

SN: Yeah.

PJ: But it was good fun. That had to be English oak, for the concept.

SN: Right OK. And what about like reclaimed materials?

PJ: Reclaimed wood?

SN: Well and features as well I was thinking, you know like if an architrave's been pulled out of a house?

PJ: Yeah.

SN: They sometimes get kept at reclaimed yards don't they?

PJ: They do yeah.

SN: And I was just wondering, anything like that, if you ever used anything like that?

PJ: Occasionally yeah, if it's nice, yeah. But we do that much that we can't, you know...

SN: No, you can't rely on it.

PJ: You can't keep it. Nowhere to keep it.

SN: Right. OK.

PJ: But there's a pile downstairs that I pulled out of a Victorian house in Batley not long ago. I kept it cos I liked the l...it just had stencil painted on it but it was quite old.

SN: Oh really?

PJ: Yeah, it's downstairs. I don't know what I'll do with it but it's there. I've rescued it twice from the skip cos they want to chuck it out! Workmen have a less romantic idea of the past than other people.

SN: Yeah. Things like that, I don't know, it was a Victorian building but it wasn't protected, it wasn't listed...

PJ: It was listed yeah.

SN: Oh it was?

PJ: Yeah we were putting new windows in yeah.

SN: And the Victorian paneling came out?

PJ: No it was the panel between two windows. You know if you get two windows side by side, the panel in between them. Nearly that wide. But, you know, it was hidden, it was behind a mirror. Somebody had put a mirror in front of it.

SN: Oh I see.

PJ: And when I pulled it off it had this stenciling and I thought 'that's nice, I'll keep that'. One day it might come in handy.

SN: Might do.

PJ: But it might not.

SN: No.

PJ: We've loads of stuff downstairs, you know, pitch pine, erm tongue and groove that we've kept from chapels and there's a load of teak workshops that we salvaged from Bradford University.

SN: Really?

PJ: Chemistry labs, yeah. Which we've used every now and then.

SN: Yeah, I can imagine.

PJ: But we don't buy second hand timber.

SN: Right, you just keep it.

PJ: Just if we get some from on a a job you know, that's particularly interesting or nice. You know a nice feature, you might as well keep it.

SN: So what sort of work were you doing at the chapel?

PJ: We weren't, we were just getting the timber. They were pulling the chapel down down the road, years ago. It was all pitch pine and they were chucking it away so we went and got it.

SN: Right I see.

PJ: Used to do a lot of kitchens in pitch pine at that time.

SN: Right OK.

PJ: So we'd recycle it.

SN: And what about the university?

PJ: Friend of mine worked there as the chap in charge of all the buildings and they were chucking it out.

SN: Right.

PJ: And I think I saw the opportunity to make a few quid so he sold it to us really cheap. Cos teak is...

SN: Really valuable...?

PJ: Fantastically expensive. They had to change for health and safety to plastic work tops, you know, benches, desks, whatever they're called, in labs.

KL: Oh.

PJ: So....was being chucked away.

SN: Mmmm.

PJ: Yeah.

SN: Right.

PJ: But, yeah, we keep the nice bits, but you can't really keep loads of it cos we haven't got room. *(Very muffled)*...it's a rabbit warren this place.

SN: What's downstairs?

PJ: Erm, I'll give you a tour if you want, when we've finished. Erm, machines, benches, sanding, tools, erm another room, and then stuff that's made ready to go out.

SN: OK.

PJ: There's a shop on the end actually, just gets full of stuff. I'll show you if you're interested.

KL: Yeah.

SN: Mmm.

KL: A shop...as in selling...like a shop window?

PJ: Yeah, it is but it never, you know, it's, never got used like that. We thought perhaps we might display stuff, but erm it's, you know, there's no passing trade. It's not, not the area for it.

KL: Yeah.

PJ: Our romantic youth, thinking all this nice furniture, and display it, and it'd be all, they'd be queuing up to buy it. But it don't work.

KL: How long have you been established as, as...

PJ: 30 years.

KL: 30 years?

PJ: Next year.

KL: And you've been here all the time?

PJ: Yeah.

KL: And do you make furniture then? Or...

PJ: Yeah, every now and then. Not very often, cos, you know, it's expensive to buy hand made furniture.

KL: Yes.

PJ: So there's not, you know, people, go to IKEA.

KL: *Gasps*

PJ: You know, Bradford's not the best market. If we were in Harrogate maybe. It might be different. But it's you know, it's, well, it's a poor city is Bradford.

KL: Mmm.

PJ: So hand made furniture's not high on the list of...

KL: Mmm

PJ: I mean some people will. Erm, yeah if we had a show room in Harrogate maybe, or Ilkley, it might be different. But we don't.

KL: But then you wouldn't be near Saltaire and err...

PJ: We wouldn't no. That's right

KL: You're fortunate from that point of view.

PJ: Yeah, we've got lots of contacts over the years. To say we don't advertise, it just keeps coming in. Touch wood.

SN: With Saltaire itself. Do you know if the buildings there are listed?

PJ: They are yeah.

SN: They are, all of them?

PJ: Yeah.

SN: Right, I didn't know that. Must be a massing listing mustn't it.

PJ: Yeah, every single house. And, you know, the mill and Victoria Hall. The school, the college. Yeah, everything's listed, yeah.

SN: Right. But you've never done any work on any of the other buildings, like the school?

PJ: Yeah, I did some work on Victoria Hall a few years ago. Doors I think. We've just started...up until last year they wouldn't allow double-glazing in Saltaire, you know. Cos it had to be exactly as it was. Everybody that had new windows had to have them single glazed.

SN: Mmm.

PJ: But we've just started, just got approval for a double-glazing system that they think is OK. So we've started, we've done a few now. (*muffled*) getting 'em double-glazed.

SN: Oh right.

KL: But th, they look the same do they? Sor...ex...

PJ: Yeah, you can see it now, if you reach that little triangle above the files.

SN: Oh yeah.

KL: Oh right.

PJ: So it's ultra slim...

SN: Very slim isn't it?

PJ: Double-glazing, yeah. So when it's...put into the frame. You can't tell.

KL: Mmm, goodness.

PJ: It's very expensive.

SN: But with the beading, I mean I don't know what the sash windows look like in Saltaire, but...

PJ: Yeah, that's the problem. They've got very narrow beading.

SN: Right. OK. So that could go into the beading?

PJ: That'll go into the beading.

SN: Really?

PJ: Yeah.

KL: Goodness.

PJ: Whi, which none of the others...you know, ordinary double-glazing won't, cos it's too thick.

SN: It's huge isn't it?

KL: So did you, did you find this as it were? Or is this...somebody come to you...

PJ: Can't remember.

KL: and sort of say 'right, there is this...'

PJ: Erm, this is from a firm in Scotland (*muffled* – 33:35)

KL: Oh right yes

PJ: So whether they got in touch with us or not, or we saw in somewhere, in an article. I'm not sure.

SN: But who's been, who's got, who's got the approval from the council? Is it you or one of the residents?

PJ: One of the residents....

SN: Or a group of residents?

PJ: Yeah, with our advice.

SN: Right.

PJ: You know, a couple of people sort of asked about it and we said 'well there's this stuff that they might approve or they might not'. We talked to 'em and, you know (*muffled*)'. Diane actually. You know Diane?

SN: I've met her yeah. She's retired now hasn't she?

PJ: She has yeah.

SN: I've met her a couple of times. I've never met Saul though.

PJ: Right yeah. And they weren't sure, but one of our clients wanted to do it. So we did an application, you know, cos we often do a listed building application for people.

KL: OK.

SN: Oh really.

PJ: Especially if they need drawings, yeah. Erm and so we did one for that ant it was approved. So, as long as it's approved for one it's approved for....

KL: Yeah, yeah.

PJ: ...for everybody.

KL: So do you just deal then with this firm directly?

PJ: Yeah, we just order it. Just, you know, tell them what size we want and they send it.

KL: And, to do that, do you have to order a certain number at a time?

PJ: No. You just have to pay, you know, there's a minimum. There's a minimum price for sizes. Yeah, I mean it's really expensive. It adds, it adds about £300 to the cost of a window.

SN: Really?

PJ: Yeah, oh yeah. It's got krypton gas in it.

KL: We're not presumably talking about particularly big windows?

PJ: No. Their six pane, you know, 12 panes, about that size. Six over six. Six panes in the tops sash and six at the bottn.

KL: Right, of course I wasn't thinking...yeah. So you just ask for 12, 12 or whatever.

PJ: Yeah, we just send them the list. Scuse me. (*Phone rings*).

KL: So that's interesting that. So, that might bring in some...

PJ: Yeah, if they want to pay for it yeah.

KL: Yeah, well, I suppose that's the thing, if it's that expensive. And there are no grants?

PJ: No. No.

KL: That's, err, going to put a lot of people off.

SN: Do you ever wonder if like the council departments communicate with each other? So if the estates department had a listed building that needed, you know, the windows refurbishing or something, they would then go to the conservation departments.

PJ: Well they wouldn't directly, they'd have to put in for, erm, listed building consent, so they would see it.

SN: That's true. But I mean, to find out about people like you I mean.

PJ: Well, I don't know. They might. Erm, they'd probably just give it to erm, whoever deals, getting contractors to. No I don't imagine they would have, you know, it would ring a bell saying there are these contractors that can do this, you know. Not in the council no.

(Phone rings)

PJ: ...communicate with each other in the council

SN: In that way

PJ: In that way.

SN: Well, yeah, it just seems a bit. I don't know. Maybe it's an opportunity, I don't know.

KL: Do you ever, do you ever work on anything like hospitals or art galleries or...?

PJ: Erm, yeah. We've done work for the err Cartwright Hall art gallery and Cliff Castle museum.

KL: Right, so would that be through the local council?

PJ: Yeah, that's the council, yeah. Yeah.

KL: And have you err worked sort of directly or was that through another contractor?

PJ: Yeah, n, no, that was direct.

KL: Directly?

PJ: Mmm.

KL: And, so, I mean, do you tend to find in those cases, they came to you again and asked?

PJ: Yeah, cos they know us cos we've done a few things for them over the years. So, if there's something a bit odd, usually things that are a bit odd, that they can't....*(muffled)*....some people that'll do, you know, in house, but...

KL: You mentioned that there was one occasion that the number of windows was too many for what you could realistically do.

PJ: Yeah.

KL: So, when they do contact you, on the whole, are the jobs of the right kind of scale and size for what you can cope with?

PJ: Yeah, I imagine.

KL: Right OK. And that just again, is that cos they know you and what you...

PJ: I don't know. I s'pose, I s'pose, yeah, erm. Yeah I guess so yeah. They don't...they're not very big...we just got one...we just made a toilet seat for Cartwright Hall.

(Laughter)

KL: Oh really? Really, just that's it?

PJ: No. One toilet seat and repair of another one. They've got really nice old Victorian toilets in there.

KL: That is a small job isn't it?

SN: Tiny job!

PJ: Yeah, it is a small job.

(PJ leaves room)

PJ:how much would it cost to....

KL: But obviously you wouldn't have to go through a formal sort of tender...

PJ: Nooo.

KL: ...it's just not worth the while...

PJ: They wouldn't put that out to different people, no.

KL: No.

PJ: So erm, it's sorta varied.

KL: Yes.

(MP leaves room)

PJ: That's what we build. There's loads on the computer, but...

KL: Of all the things that you, that you do.... Cos you've got a website haven't you?

PJ: We do, yes. Actually some people come, occasionally get in touch with us, that they've seen stuff on the website.

KL: That's what I was thinking. You say you don't advertise, but obviously you've got that kind of err...

PJ: Yeah, we did that. Years ago, yeah.

KL: Oh right. So you've had that in place...

PJ: yeah, yeah it's been there ages yeah.

KL: Right.

PJ: Shop fronts, yeah. It's got some shop fronts on it. We do those every now and then.

KL: Oh, OK. So what made you decide to do that then, if you...?

PJ: The website?

KL: Yeah, if you haven't got 'round to doing some of these other things.

PJ: I don't know! I don't know! I just got it in my head that we ought to do it.

KL: Right.

PJ: And I 'ave a friend that does, that does 'em. So I went to see 'im...

KL: Oh, ok. Yeah.

PJ: An 'e did it. I mean 'alf way, I wish I'd not bothered 'alf way through. Cos I thought 'oh he can do it', but 'e kept asking me questions...

KL: Haha

SN: Photographs an things...

KL: What? All the stuff to put on it? And err...

PJ: An I 'ad to write stuff, and... But anyway, we did it. It doesn't bring much in, but..

KL: But occasionally there's...

PJ: Occasionally people get in touch, yeah.

KL: And is there much cost, is there any cost involved in maintaining that?

PJ: I don't know, I s'pose so. Is there? I don't know.

KL: Well you're not particularly aware of...like you say, you haven't updated it or any...

PJ: I'm not.

KL: ...thing or...

PJ: No no no no. I think there is a cost, to do something or other...

SN: You probably 'ave to pay for the name of the server or whatever it is... What do they call it?

PJ: Don't know. Don't know anything about it.

SN: The URL. The name.

KL: So that you appear, when somebody searches...

SN: Yeah, you'd have to pay for that too.

KL: ...so you actually appear. But I don't know how that works.

PJ: I don't know.

KL: Whether it's just part of your normal computer bill...I don't know!

SN: No!

KL: But anyway, it's obviously not something that...

PJ: No

KL: ...you're aware of as having a major cost.

PJ: No, not a major cost, no.

KL: OK. Erm, was there anything else?

SN: Not really. I think the only other thing is, when I was here last I remember asking Simon about the conversion at err...and refurbishment of Listed Mill. It's just next door.

PJ: Yeah. It's come to a stop.

SN: Yes. Has it really? A grinding halt. But I asked him if he'd been involved and he obviously said no, but he'd rung up to see if there was any erm...what kind of work there was. He was told that it was a company in Manchester or something..?

PJ: Yeah. Urban Splash.

SN: Yeah, they're the developer aren't they?

PJ: They are yes. Erm, no, it was all fitting out really. You know, site stuff. Apart from the windows, which are metal.

SN: Yeah, the windows are metal aren't they.

KL: Oh are they?

PJ: Yeah. So, although this, the windows along this, err Heaton Road, they're wooden ones. And the big doors which we could do. But erm, but we didn't no. Although we did the odd little bit cos they used to come in every now and then for bits a wood machining.

SN: Oh really?

PJ: Yeah, but that was it. But it's all come to a stop...

KL: Just lack of money?

PJ: Well since 2008 everything stopped. That stopped along with it and it's not started again.

SN: OK. Well thank you very much.

PJ: You're welcome.

KL: You certainly weren't expecting us...

Tape stops and restarts

SN: Really...

PJ: ...fancy, stained glass.

SN: Oh really? That will be Craven, yeah.

KL: Skipton?

SN: Yeah.

PJ: Yeah, but they were bloody useless the administration up there.

SN: I'm not surprised.

PJ: Absolutely appalling. They never sent us a bill, for it.

SN: Really?

PJ: Yeah. An then, and then, several months later I got a phone call from the debt collection agency saying we 'aven't paid our bill and they're gonna take us to court an blah blah blah...

SN: Oh God.

PJ: An it was about four times as much as the bill we were sposed to be payin'. Just useless up there. They didn't 'ave a clue.

SN: Really.

PJ: Half the courses, when I got there they'd only appointed the tutor the night before. They'd forgotten about it. 'E'd 'ad to come over from somewhere, 'e was late. Simon went to do a course an it was cancelled when 'e got there.

SN: Really?

PJ: Yeah. They were really, really bad.

SN: Right.

PJ: Shame really. That conference they organised....was it them that organised that?

SN: Yeah.

PJ: That was alright.

SN: The conference was OK yeah.

PJ: Good day, yeah. I enjoyed that.

SN: Yeah. But that's bad, that the training was so poor.

PJ: Oh it was yeah. They've got the facilities there. I think they do longer courses don't they? Arthur went to do a staircase making course...

SN: Oh did 'e? Did 'e enjoy it?

PJ: 'E did, yeah?

SN: Ok. How long did that last?

PJ: It was about six weeks I think.

SN: In the evening?

MP In the evening yeah. Six evenings.

SN: OK. It's hard isn't it? If you do wanna get some training...?

PJ: I don't know. I imagine it is, yeah. We 'aven't got any apprentices now. Erm, we always had them but the last one left last year and we 'aven't got anymore. Just cos I think, erm, I don't want... I think I might be winding down a bit in the next year or two.

SN: Oh really? You're thinking about retiring?

PJ: Well, doing less yes. I'm a bit scared about retiring.

Personal

PJ: No it's not that. There's loads a things I can do, I'd like to do.

SN: Mmm.

PJ: But you get...it's funny int it?

Talking about personal things

SN: Haha. But what, from what you said, like if you two decided to retire...

PJ: Yeah, it would be difficult, yeah.

SN: The company would...

PJ: Well I don't know. Would 'ave to tak to 'em about it. But yeah, it would be difficult, yeah.

SN: Cos there are certain things that you do that no-one else 'as kind of got an interest in.

PJ: Yeah, that's right, yeah. They might do, y'know, if it came to it. Yeah. That is difficult.

SN: I'm just wondering if that interest you've got is because you're from, you're, you know, a bit older?

PJ: I don't know.

SN: ...Maybe it was the way you were trained or something like that but you just don't think...anything you can put your finger on. It might just be, the way it is.

PJ: Err...I don't know. No. I don't know.

SN: No. It's a difficult one isn't it?

PJ: Yeah, I spose I've always liked, you know, architecture. And erm an art I spose. Yeah. Questions of art.

SN: Mmm

PJ: Yeah, always, ever since I was at school.

KL: So that's kind of made you have a go at that side of, that side of things.

PJ: Yeah, it gives me pleasure, yeah.

KL: Did you ever do any training in kind of drawing as such?

PJ: No, no, no. Much to my regret. I woulda gone to art school if I'd a had my chance. But...

SN: Oh really?

PJ: Yeah.

SN: It's interesting to hear you talk about this kind of creative side of it, of the job.

PJ: Yeah. Well it is int it?

SN: Definitely, yeah. It definitely is. But it's so different from, y'know, what you might be doing if you were fitting windows on a big site.

PJ: Oh god, yeah.

SN: Even though the guys out there don't do the creative thing that you do, necessarily, do you think they prefer the job because what they're making is slightly more complicated than...

PJ: Well, yeah I think so yeah. But, I mean, even people on site fitting stuff...I mean it can get boring, but a good craftsman will still take pride in doing in right.

SN: Yeah.

PJ: I mean a lot of 'em don't, but a lot of 'em do. Yeah I had to do Latin when I were at school. I couldn't do art.

SN: Oh really? I bet that's been useful.

PJ: Oh yeah, great.

KL: Amo amas amat

PJ: Yeah. Amo amas amat.

KL: Yes.

PJ: Well there you go.

KL: Yeah, there was just something I was gonna ask then and it's gone. It's gone. I don't think it's gonna come back.

SN: Ok. Well it might come back when we're going round mightn't it?

KN: I think it's when you said about....erm a craftsperson. An you were talking about somebody working on just like, site, doing kind of modern windows and things. Is there a diff...would you still call that personal craftsperson, or a trades....is there a difference between somebody if...

PJ: Not really. It's just a different way of talking about them.

KL: I'm just wondering because I read something the other day that said in the UK we haven't got a definition of what a craft is...

PJ: No...

KL: ...but some other countries do...

PJ: ...yeah.

KL: It was interesting that you made a distinction in the terms...

PJ: I spose I do really. I could look at someone and see which they are. But, people'll fit plastic windows an there's not much to it really. But you still 'ave to do it right, but no it's not a craft. But it's always been low status in England. Erm, the crafts, y'know, university was what you aimed for, rather than getting a err apprenticed, a proper apprenticeship in a, in a craft.

KL: Mmm.

PJ: Because that was higher status. An it still is.

KL: Hence the Latin and not the art.

PJ: Yeah. Yeah, I was in the 'a' stream, y'know, art was for the thck ones that were in the c stream. Y'know, that kind of attitude. It's awful.

KL: And do you think that's changing at all?

PJ: No. Is it hell!

KL: Getting worse? Or just...

PJ: No, I think it's always been bad an it's still bad.

KL: Mmm. Even for the really skilled, even the top end?

PJ: Cameron talks about....Yeah...talks about all these apprenticeships, but they're crap half of 'em. You know, they're not proper ones. Erm...you compare....we've had several Ger...young German people come and work here.

KL: Oh right.

PJ: On this....what's it called? Erasmus is it?

KL: Oh yeah, yeah.

PJ: Have you heard of it? Some kind of EU scheme where if they could find themselves a placement, a job, they got half their wages paid and we paid the other half. So it was great, and they were fantastic. Really highly trained. You know from college.

SN: How old were they?

PJ: They were erm, 20, 21. We had two. Mark and Matthias, and Maricha a girl, who was really good. They were all really, really good. Y'know, just fitted in. Erm, once they'd stopped laughing at the state of the old fashioned machinery, y'know, it's all a bit higher tech. But, I mean they really enjoyed it. And we enjoyed 'avin' 'em. And they were great workers, y'know. Their training was...y'know...it wasn't, and it isn't, looked down upon y'know, or engineering and stuff in Germany. It's...

KL: They have, they stream I think at about 14, but each of them seem to valued much more equally, don't they?

PJ: That's right, yeah. Rather than...

KL: I did a project on that once...

PJ: Double Classics at Oxbridge...which is, y'know, highly valued.

KL: Yeah.

PJ: I mean it's interesting, and I'm sure it is valuable in itself, but not more valuable. When there are, y'know, other things that you could do. But, y'know, that's the old grammar secondary modern school separation that they used to do int it?

KL: Mmmm.

PJ: But then there were loads of, y'know. But that's what education's about int it? It fits people into there role in society if it works well.

KL: Yes.

PJ: An then, in those days, there were loads of crap jobs that kids could come out of secondary modern jobs an get. There aren't anymore. Y'know, it's changed, so we need a highly educated. But they, y'know, they just expanded university's rather than technical training. That was the answer.

KL: That's right.

PJ: 50% people at University rather than put a lot of money into other kinds of training.

KL: Mmmm. Yes, that's interesting. So how long did they stay? The people that came here?

PJ: Mmm. Mark was here 6 months, an he came back, did another 6 months. After he'd been home. Came back, fancied it. An Matthias was here for 9 months I think. And Maricha, oh, 9 months. Yeah.

KL: And has that kind of stopped now?

PJ: It has yeah. Well I don't know if the scheme's still going, but we haven't had any more.

KL: And they just approached you?

PJ: Yeah, yeah.

SN: How did they find out about you?

PJ: Don't know.

KL: That's interesting isn't it. You haven't put your name down on anything that you're aware of...

PJ: Simon might remember, but I can't.

KL: Yeah. Cos I'd a though it was, not the most obvious choice!

SN: No, absolutely!

PJ: There was some connection, but I can't think what it was. It might a been a personal connection. Simon might a known someone that knew someone that...

KL: Right OK.

PJ: Was working in one a these schemes....but I'm not sure. And once one came, y'know, it was on file I spose.

KL: And when they came here were they already...had they more or less completed their...

PJ: They'd just finished their apprenticeships.

KL: Right, they'd just finished. So they were obviously qualified to do...

PJ: They were qualified but they weren't experienced

KL: Right OK.

SN: And would you say they were on a level with the apprentices that...

PJ: They were better.

SN: Really? Even in your own company?

PJ: We've 'ad a mixture. We've taken lads that erm along with Colin, who's great, they weren't better than Colin. 'E came from a work experience, y'know, dead keen, rang us up the year after, 'e was great. The first two we had, Jimmy and Lou, they're really good. Work for themselves now.

SN: Do they?

PJ: Yeah. But we've 'ad a mixture. Y'know we've 'ad lads that erm that came on these schemes where they couldn't get on at school, y'know...

SN: That never works...

PJ: They send 'em out to, you know, buck their ideas up, into the world a work. An we've 'ad a couple of them who we've managed to get grants for an keep on, and get 'em through their apprenticeship.

KL: Oh, OK.

PJ: But they were never gonna be great, y'know, highly skilled. But they were good enough to...

KL: Yeah, it's an achievement getting...

PJ: Well no, good enough to go and get jobs. One of them, Brian, works for the council, fitting stuff and that.

KL: Right, OK.

PJ: An y'know, at a level where 'e could work. Yeah, y'know. An Simon works for a company that does hospitals an stuff.

KL: An you say that there was a girl came over as well?

PJ: Maricha, yes.

KL: Is that kind of unusual? Don't know whether it's delivate territory or not, but err...

PJ: Yeah, I think it is, yeah. There aren't that many girls taing apprenticeships in the construction trade are there?

KL: No, that's what I would 'ave thought. I just wondered whether there were many females doing that kind of thing in this country. Or...

PJ: A few...

SN: I think there are a few, but again I think they tend to be in the big companies. There are a couple at the Minster.

PJ: Are there?

SN: Mmm, yeah there are three girls...female stonemasons at the Minster.

KL: Right.

PJ: Yeah, I come across the odd one every now and again, decorators, and err there a plumbing firm. A couple of women running a plumbing firm.

KL: Right.

SN: Yeah, it's sometimes a selling point isn't it....you know in like...

PJ: Well, it is. These are a couple of gay women. Call themselves stop cock!

SN: Ah hah!

PJ: Quite funny. But they weren't very humorous actually...

SN: Were they not?

PJ: Tried to get some work outta them...

SN: They meant it!

PJ: Might well a done. But...err, but there aren't many no. It's a very chauvinist world the building trade. On site, you should hear it. Awful...

Pause

SN: Well thank you very much indeed...

David Cleere, Firm06CJ. December 6th 2011

KL: There we are. That's it isn't it? No, cos it's on the wrong file.... Anyway, we'll start and I'll fiddle and just come in behind.

SN: OK. So it's Sophie Norton and Kim Loader talking to David Cleere and Simon Blackman of Firm06CJ and it's the 6th of December. An we're here to talk about, really, your experiences as a craft and conservation company, erm as part of the supply chain. I'm interested in conservation and craftsmanship, as you know. Kim has err probably introduced herself by now, but err is interested in small medium sized companies erm and the wider supply chain, with an emphasis on the public sector. So we've got a couple of questions about that, so we just wanna ask you about really your experiences.

SB: Er huh.

SN: Because I've got an interest in training, I just wanted to ask how you came to be where you are, erm how many people work for the company, and how they kind of, how they trained with you, you know, how they got to be skilled in the way that they're skilled.

DC: Yeah. Well, from the outset this firm was err a family business, erm, which goin' down the generations, me self as a director now, previously it was...Simon still obviously still is director...with anoth...with a brother, and a, and err cousin. Previous generation it was their fathers...

SN: Right

DC: Two brothers partners in the firm. Before that it was their uncle. Great uncle.

SN: Right, OK.

DC: But, as a family, goin' back to my granddad's granddad, they were all apprentice trained joiners, working locally. The real was. Y'know the carriage works buildin', the Pullman trains, an.... Prior to that, we've got an old picture up there, stems from me granddad's granddad, working out of Helmsley. One was a joiner, one was a glazier, one was a w... a mason.

SN: Right.

DC: So, erm, I'm 6th generation family joiner.

SN: Right.

DC: Just worked through school, did A levels, not sort of having any sort of knowledge of the family business. Never pushed into it, always just left me to find my own way. And, I was invited to join the business. Went off to college, did buildin' studies, came back and I was more....I was trained in the workshop but I never did an apprenticeship. Just worked alongside my granddad for 3 years. Then I worked my way into the office. Everybody else that's been with the firm, barring 1 employee of 11.

(Tea comes in).

DC: We've got 11 employees at the minute, 3 as family directors, but the other 8. Only one of them 'as joined us 'as joined us in the last 5 years from elsewhere. They've all, all the others 'ave been apprentice trained from school leaving.

SN: Right.

DC: So, going up to the most senior member of staff being. Didier. 'E's worked with us...'e's in 'is mid-50s. 'E's worked with us since 'e was 15.

SN: Really.

DC: He's got a son workin' for us now who's joined as an apprentice. We've got another lad called James. 'E's got a....we've recently taken on an apprentice, and that was his son.

SN: Right.

DC: So, some say it's a bit of a life sentence when you come here, but...

SN: Yeah haha

DC: But erm, that's just the way it is really. They do what used to be City and Guilds joinery apprenticeship, but now it's an NVQ in either bench joinery or site joinery.

SN: Right.

DC: Erm, an, generally, we're just passin' on the same learnin' skills as we were taught, from our, y'know, school leaving. Until today really. There's more modern aspects obviously in the more modern day sorta trainin', that they get. But in essence it's still the same craft, it's still the same skills involved.

SN: How do you find the, kind of, new NVQ courses? Compliment what you teach in the workshop. Do you find that they learn more here or...

DC: Erm, well, because it's...you've got to know.... You can't just know your joinery when you're workin' on workshops or on site now, it's all the other health and safety issues, and the...al them kinda things. And that's where the colleges come in handy, cos it's heavily weighted on that. The actual craft skills themselves, they mainly get that through the workshop experience.

SN: Right.

DC: Erm...I would say...and depending on the, the operative, when they go to college, sometimes they might come away from school with not the required level of basics. So we 'ad one apprentice who we took on, who was excellent, can't be faulted, but, y'know, 'alf 'is college time was spent, in the firt year, just doin' basic arithmetic and literacy, that kinda thing.

SN: OK.

DC: So but, y'know, 'e turned out to be an excellent apprentice. 'E's one of our top lads sorta thing. So...

SN: Right.

DC: Eventually, if they, if the joiner's right minded enough, it's a good balance from the college, from what they get in the workshop. I mean I can only speak for the chaps we have. But, the fact is they stayed with us, an for so long, means we don't really look to change the way we do things, y'know. Erm, but err...yeah I think in the main, the college, they do a good job. I mean they recently changed with the new York College, they've only ever gone to York College, they've never gone to Leeds or anywhere else...

SN: Right.

DC: Like I say, up to now, we're happy with things. Y'know. They've always come through. Er've never 'ad a fail as such.

SN: Right OK.

DC: We've 'ad apprentices through the ranks who we've never continued to employ, but erm...

SN: Oh really?

DC: Yeah it's not...over the years we've taken apprentices on and some are good enough to stay with us, some choose not to stay with us, and some drop out and don't fancy joinery at all. They go and sell insurance or something like that. So...

SN: So you think the apprenticeship is kind of like the training, and if you take them on beyond their apprenticeship, then they tend to stay with you for an awful long period of time?

DC: Mmmm.

SN: OK.

KL: Do you get many people coming to you, y'know, to be apprentices?

DC: Yeah.

KL: There's a lot of...

DC: Yeah, May June time you get a lot of letters comin' in from kids at school sayin' 'I'm lookin' to be a joiner'...

SN: But you can't take everybody on.

DC: We can't take everybody on. An you've got to, you know, balance the workload. Over the last few years we would 'ave ideally taken on another apprentice because the age at which our previous apprentices had reached, you know some of the tasks we were asking them to do was a bit beneath them, and 'oldin' their skills back in a way. But there just wasn't the justification. No work load to take it on.

SN: Right.

DC: So it's only the back quarter of this year, y'know we realised we gotta start getting an apprentice in cos we've been busy over the last 6 months and we're likely to be...so it's a shame not to take somebody on, y'know.

SN: Right. So you've taken on somebody's son?

DC: Mmm. Well 'e came to us with work experience last year, an then y'know, such is the job market for young kids, there was nothing...'e just couldn't find any work.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: It came to a point when we thought, y'know, 'e'd already given us experience and we knew 'ow good 'e was. We gave 'im the opportunity.

SN: What about if somebody came to you as a career changer, and said they wanted to get into joinery. Would that, that would be....?

DC: Yeah, well we take in the applications an again it's dependant on workload. If we can see there's an opportunity for somebody...

SN: Mmmm

DC: We would look at it.

SN: Have you ever done that?

DC: What taken somebody who's, for a career change?

SN: Yeah.

DC: No.

SN: Ok.

DC: We don't many enquiries...I'm trying to think of the last one we had, but... I do... you get people moving into the area, who've y'know, worked elsewhere. I can't think of anybody recently, I the last couple a years, where, 'ad a career change as such.

SN: Right.

DC: You've gotta be a brave man who wants to be a joiner in the middle of a recession! Hahaha.

SN: Right, OK. And then the only other thing I wanted to ask you about sort of training was the heritage skills NVQ.

DC: Uh huh.

SN: An if you were interested in that, or if your guys were intereted in that. Of if you'd looked into it at all.

DC: Well we got the heritage accreditation on the...

SN: Oh you've got the cards haven't you.

DC: The CSCS cards, yeah.

SN: Would the heritage NVQ then, might be something that you'd look at for your apprentices?

DC: Could well be, yeah.

SN: If they...obviously, if they stay beyond the first 3 years

DC: Yeah, yeah. Erm, course the thing we try and do from the outset is think 'well what benefit would it have the firm'. And if there's no enquiries coming through, you tend to think well, you're training them up for a job that might never come to fruition, or exists sorta thing.

SN: Yeah.

DC: Erm. So, erm, but it's still, y'know, never say never.

SN: Mmm.

KL: Cos you do work quite a lot in heritage field don't you? You do a lot of church work, and...

DC: Well we do a pretty broad spectrum to be honest, and, I mean, taking into account what we've got at the minute, we've got a few jobs which do work within the heritage sector. We've made some windows for a Lottery aided erm project in Middlesbrough. That's listed building conversions. We've been working in Bradford Cathedral, altering some church pews and bits and pieces, an church paneling. So there's, yeah, there's area's like that which, I like to think, y'know, are ideal for us an our skills, an y'know the clients'll come to us because they know we'll work in that sector.

SN: Mmm.

DC: Erm, but y'know, sayin' that if was the right job we'd end up, y'know, puttin' roof trusses on all day. If it paid well. We're in business to do business at the end of the day.

SN: Mmm.

DC: Erm, so err. Like I say, it's been successful now for long enough an I think it'll continue.

SN: How long's it been? 100 years?

DC: Nearly 100 years yeah.

SN: Right. That's quite a long time. An then, you said a minute ago that the craft itself doesn't change, erm do you mean by that that what you're making doesn't change, but the way it's put together is different, or...?

DC: No, no I think the basics are still the same. It's all a case of, y'know, hand working with wood. Y'know machining to section, and then, y'know, form your joints, and, whichever you're...whether you're making a door or a window...

SN: Mmm.

DC: The actual basics are still the same. The way we do them are still the same. There are other manufacturers who make things differently. Might, y'know, do things in a more modern, cost effective way, but it doesn't....it's maybe to the detriment of the final product.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: So, you know, we don't have CNC routers and big technological equipment like that. It's basically all hand machined, hand made, put together, cleaned off by hand. Whoever makes it will go out and fix it sort of thing.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: It's not a production line as such.

SN: Do you make all your moulds and things like that as well?

DC: Uh huh. Yeah.

SN: Right OK. You don't buy any thing in?

DC: We do, but only if it's specified by an architect as such. If we 'ave to make something to match an existing profile then we will do so, even if we 'aven't got the cutters, we'll have the cutters made to machine the mould offset.

SN: Right. OK.

DC: Or somebody might just say, the architect or the client might just say, 'go an pick up a few 100 metres of what ever you can get from Dewson's'.

SN: Mmm. Does that make you like, erm, less able to take on really small jobs do you think? Y'know, if somebody just wanted one sash window repairing? For example. That'd be too expensive?

DC: Err, to be fair, yeah, we are in a position, especially in this day an age, where we can't compete with whoever can work from the back of a van. We've a workshop and overheads to absorb into our prices. An on top of that, y'know, one man bands, who don't need to charge VAT 'ave got a 20% head start on us you see.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: So, 2 aspects there which means it's difficult to compete. An ideal job for us is where there's some manufacturing, some quality or quantity, where these chaps from the back of a van don't 'ave any...don't 'ave a workshop basically, so they can't compete.

SN: That's interesting.

KL: But does it work the other way as well? Because you're sticking to sort of the hand crafted approach, you said it's not a production line. That limits the scope...

DC: It does yeah.

KL: ...of what you can do as well.

DC: Yeah, yeah yeah.

KL: So...

DC: Although we can do it all. People might not turn to us and thinkin' 'well they just do manufacturing and we won't ring 'em up and ask them to come and fix me sash window'

KL: Mmmm

DC: Or they'll hear, look online, or their'll know of us, an they'll think 'ooh they're too expensive. I'll go to...I'll ring Bob down the end of the street. He'll come an do it'.

KL: But presumably you can take on particularly large jobs then. Or it might take longer?

DC: So if we're takin' on large jobs.

KL: I'm just thinkin', y'know, if the too big is going to be as problematic as the jobs that are too small...

DC: Erm....yeah well, if a job's too big, normally the client or main contractor'll have it...will know what we're capable of.

KL: Mmm, mmm.

DC: Erm, I mean we can normally work up to projects worth up to about err I don't know, four, five hundred thousand pound.

KL: Right.

DC: Erm, so, but that will give you a whole...y'know, big quantity of windows if you want them. Or... staircases or doors or whatever. Err... There isn't many large jobs that have happened in the area that we've not had the chance to quote for. Err, so... It's y'know, the smaller market is one where your Mr and Mrs Smith'll think 'oh well it's too smaller job for them', or 'they'll be too expensive, I'll see if I can find somebody else'. Y'know.

SN: Mmm. Yeah. And it wouldn't make a difference if the majority of the job was repair? I'm just thinking because you've got such, y'know, you've got a big manufacturing workshop.

DC: Yeah.

SN: So if it was repair, a lot of it was inspection and just replacing small bits, that would still not make a difference really?

DC: I mean we 'ave done repair jobs before in the past. Y'know, if it was a big National Trust property an their 'avin' all the windows...

SN: Yeah...cos it's quite...

DC: We've been...we've worked on them jobs before, whether it be at Nostell Priory or Beningborough Hall or something like that...erm. So y'know that's not to say that we wouldn't do it or that we wouldn't get approached.

SN: No, no.

DC: Yeah.

SN: It's all possible...

DC: Everything's possible. We aim to please.

SN: Haha....ok. I guess now would be a good time to maybe ask you about sub-contracting and working to the client.

You can lead on that; if you like...

KL: Well, just, erm, really the majority of your work...would you say you work directly to the client or to a main contractor?

DC: Well it can change. It's amaz...y'know...recently, all our work is to a main contactor this year. The previous year, it was probably all to private individuals.

SN: Really

DC: Just the way it was. Erm...we refurbished a couple a houses, one in York and one outside. Err, and we maybe a bit of subcontracting. It was....I'd say this year, just gone, it's probably been 80, 90% within trades, to the main contractor, and 10% to domestic clients. Previous years it was the other way 'round.

SN: Right.

DC: It's partly due to the recession I think. A year or so ago people...Mr and Mrs Smith decided not to spend anything. Everything that we're doing now, previously the funding's already been up front. Y'know, the big job at Middlesbrough was Lottery aided. It was already in place, the funding was already in place. Erm, again, for Bradford Cathedral, I'd imagine that's, y'know...

SN: I think that was probably funded....

DC: Y'know, that takes forever to get PCC approval on stuff like that. So, and then the new house that's being built, that we've been working on. Again that's not particularly...even though it's a domestic client, we're workin' for the builder.

KL: Yeah.

DC: They obviously 'ad the money aside to build this thing. Erm...

KL: And in getting that work, have you had to compete against other similar firms to yourself.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

KL: And do you feel there's much kind of competition, direct competition, either, y'know, in the local area or wider? That you err....

DC: Well in the local area there isn't that many firms with our sort of capability. You could, you could choose to y'know tender, ourselves, Beaver's, maybe Clayton's. There isn't, within our band of quality let's say, there isn't... So we're all...I'd imagine we're all tendering against each other. It gets a bit more spread out, y'know, there's not so much happening in York, so the work is a bit further afield. So that draws in other trades, other firms, that we don't 'ave any knowledge of.

KL: U huh. And so you said you 'imagine' that you're competing against each other. Do you have much contact with these...

DC: You never know, you never know. Depends 'ow well you get on with the client, y'know. And everybody's very cagey what to tell you. They'll say 'well you're competing against three others' or... when you, when the price 'as gone in, they'll say 'oh, your price was favourable'. Or, 'you're a bit out'. You never get a nice formal letter sayin' 'you were fourth, fifth', you were 'first, second'. 'These were the prices'. Very rarely do you get that.

SN: Right.

KL: Mmm. So, how far would you be prepared to look for work then? What's the kind of range of...

DC: Well ideally we sort of look within the Yorkshires.

KL: Uh huh.

DC: But we've been further afield before. I mean we just recently tendered for work....well we worked there previously, on the first phases, on the Southern Hebridean island of Islay.

SN: Really?

DC: Yeah, so. We were in line for working there again. Bet, erm, the client changed their management team of surveyors and architects, and even though we tendered for it it went to some other outfit. But err...but the work...again, if we can find that there's benefits to be had from the project we'll work anywhere. We've got a, a lead on a customer possibly to repair or replace some windows in London. It's not beyond the realms of possibility we could end up there at the start of next year.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: More and more so you look further afield cos there seems to be less and less happens within York. And because there's less work around, y'know. You've got to...

KL: And do you think there's any, (*coughs*) excuse me, reason for why you're just seeing less work in York? I mean is that York specifically rather than a general...

DC: Well I think York specifically, when you go to other areas and see what regeneration they've got on.

KL: Right.

DC: You get up to Durham, Middlesbrough area, they're doin' very well for regeneration. York's not doin' anything. Leeds 'as sorta stagnated a bit...all that was sorta new build, so their not necessarily within our , y'know, scope. You only 'ave to see the backlog of what York's, it's development plan. It's all stagnated. There's nothing happening at Hungate, nothing happening in York centre, and the central plot....it's only the university that's been developing. There's a few spec building projects...

SN: Terry's thing, that's stalled 'asn't it.

DC: Terry's thing, They don't know what to do with that.

SN: No.

DC: Err...the Derwentthorpe housing plan, that's just new build so that don't really affect us.

SN: And there's the council offices, but that's just one building project...

DC: Yeah, I mean we looked into that, and that's been a close shop since day 1 as far as I'm concerned.

SN: Right.

DC: So...

KL: Sorry, that was the council...

DC: Yeah, the West Offices.

KL: When you say 'it's been a closed shop', it hasn't been an opportunity, an open opportunity to bid for it...

DC: Well there 'as been but when it came to our particular package of joinery work it was already given out to Firm16GB's.

KL: Was already given out...

DC: Yeah because...

KL: Because they're...

DC: Miller...

KL: the supplier or...

DC: They did some consultancy work with the Council and Miller in the build up to puttin' it all, the thing out to tender, an there 'alf a million pounds worth of refurbishment work that was... I went to the presentation down at the York College, where the management of Miller and the York Council and the architects involved had an open meeting to... So that all the subcontractors could approach themselves, and themselves on tender lists for the work so they were aware of the scheme.

KL: Yes.

DC: The first thing that they announced was that Firm16GB's 'ad been awarded the £500,000 refurbishment of the West Offices, so that all the sort of joinery, electrical and plumbing subcontractors just sat back in their seats and just says 'well, there's no point in us bein' 'ere then'. So, that was the end of that.

KL: Can they do th....well obviously they've done it. But I wouldn't 'ave thought they could do that.

SN: Yeah, it's weird isn't it. Cos normally you'd have to tender wouldn't you?

DC: Yeah, yeah. And funnily enough one a the contract managers from Millers, who was procuring all the subcontractors, is now a top surveyor down at Firm16GB's.

SN: Right. There was something weird with the project wasn't there? Whereby the Council gave all responsibility to Millers for managing it, But the Council was still paying for it...

DC: It's a joint venture, it's joint venture.

KL: There should still be the EU accountability requirements for open procedures and, yeah...

SN: That's unusual though isn't it?

DC: Yeah, I mean to be fair, it was gonna be...within our sector it was gonna be the only thing in York happening in the next year or two.

KL: Yeah, yeah. Is that, is that hap...I mean is that actually ongoing now? Is it finished, or...

SN: The project's ongoing...

DC: Yeah it's ongoing yeah. Must be well into it by now. I think they've started the new build, I'm not sure.

SN: Yeah, yeah they'd done the demolition by like April hadn't they?

DC: Yeah they had, yeah.

SN: So yeah, I think they're probably on the new...they are on the new build cos you can see it from the walls can't you?

DC: Yeah.

SN: They are, they're putting up the steels.

KL: Have you put in for other erm...s...other public sector funded work? As that would 'ave been, recently, or...?

DC: Err, errr, well recently, quite a few tenders at the minute 'ave got into, y'know, within church work...Ripon Cathedral, Durham Cathedral, York Minster...

KL: Right.

DC: There's, y'know...

KL: So they'll be funded by things like the Lottery...

DC: Yeah, Lottery aided stuff yeah.

KL: Heritage...

SN: Heritage, yeah....

DC: To be fair, there isn't, y'know...the actual tender enquiries over the last couple of months 'ave quietened off again.

KL And when you put in for those kinds of jobs, do you get better erm feedback in terms of your, your particular tender, where it came, why you do or don't get the job..?

DC: Yeah well more often than not you see, we puttin' our quotes into the main contractor, so there's maybe 3 or 4 main contractors who come to us for quotes...

KL: Right

DC: And they'll all get the same quote from us...

KL: Mmmm

DC: And we've got a relatively good, relatively good erm relationship with them, so they're quite good about letting us know how they get on.

KL: Yeah.

DC: Normally the case is, you put your price into them, their obviously puttin' their tended package to the client. Then the client'll say pick out two of 'em maybe to go to interview stage, which the prices are there near enough what... An then the client will say to the main contractor 'ok, you're up against so and so'...they've basically then got to cut their price to suit the client. So the main contractor comes back to the subcontractor and says 'right, if you want the job now, you've got to cut your price sp...'. It's, y'know...

KL: And is the focus really on price these days?

DC: Yeah, without a doubt, yeah.

SN: Nothing else?

DC: No.

SN: No questions about training or y'know points for being in the local area...

DC: Well, to be fair, when we were working on the current project at Stuart park in Middlesborough, they were impressed with our heritage skills accreditation because their joiners didn't have it.

SN: Right.

DC: So they wanted us on site for that.

SN: Right.

DC: So they're in the process of getting their chaps trained up apparently.

KL You say that was Lottery funded?

DC: Yeah.

KL: That's St...what are you doing at Stuart Park? I know Stuart Park so I'm just...

DC: Right, well...the, the out buildings to the park itself are converting into visitors centre and tea rooms and things, so...y'know they're completely rebuilding it and landscaping it. We've just done the windows and doors.

KL: Uh huh.

DC: So there's a firm called Bridgwater Builders, Durham based firm...

KL: Which is the main...

DC: Main contractors on that.

KL: So was it...when you say they liked the fact you'd got the erm...

SN: Heritage Skills...it's the card...

KL: Yeah, yeah... was that the main contractor then, who was....

DC: Yeah, yeah...

KL: ...picking up on that...

DC: It's more and more, in recent months, been asked for...

KL: Right.

DC: Erm...we were sort of in talks with some contractors in Manchester. They were workin' on Manchester library...

SN: I know who you mean...Laing's?

DC: Laing O'Rourke's, yeah. And erm, so, when we had a site meeting there, y'know, it was one of the things I pushed under the door. Says 'y'know, well that was a definite for them, they couldn't 'ave anybody on site unless they were...cos it's all English Heritage paid up...or is it Manchester Council?

SN: I think it's, I think it's Manchester Council. But they might have some HLF funding, I'm not sure.

DC: But that project's died a death. The conversation's sorta stopped on that one.

SN: Oh really?

DC: 'Bout 6 months ago. Don't know where they were on that. I think they were struggling with the funding...I'm not quite sure... But erm, projects like that, I'm sure it'll come up more often won't it?

SN: Uh huh

DC: The demand for the, the card...

SN: Hopefully...hope so.

DC: Yeah.

KL: Do you, do you ever work, I suppose more in partnership with other firms when you're perhaps going for work? Either complimentary skills, so you put together a package, or other firms in the same area, just to increase your capacity and capability?

DC: Not really, no. It's normally just a straightforward master and servant kind of relationship.

KL: Right.

SN: Are you ever the master?

DC: Sometimes, yeah. When I said a couple of years ago we were working mainly on sorta domestic refurbishment to listed properties...

SN: Yeah, mmm...

DC: We would be subcontracting out the plumber's work or the electrical work.

SN: Right.

DC: Erm, on a relatively small scale. But nonetheless it works for the client if they just dealing with us.

KL: Yes, yeah.

DC: And within the sort of community of York, we've, we've not been one to sort of ask 6 electricians or 6 plumbers to tender for the work. We've only ever turned to one firm who we've trusted. In a way it works alongside with, but not...still in a sort of a contractual kind a way...erm...

SN: But if it was a public sector client you've have to wouldn't you, because of the tendering laws?

DC: Yeah.

SN: You'd have to.

DC: Yeah. We'd have to be seen to be getting, y'know, value for the public purse.

SN: Yeah. OK.

KL: Is there any reason why you don't work with other firms? It's just that I kind of read a lot of things that say this is what small businesses should be doing...

DC: Yeah...

KL: Erm...I just...

DC: Well I suppose everybody just likes to look after themselves don't they? Erm... I can't think of a need... There as a time, ooh I don't know, 20 years ago, nearly. We were working on a big refurbishment of a country manor house, and the main contractor had two different joinery firms in. There was us doing the good stuff, and another joinery firm just doin' the nuts and bolts. But that was the main contractor's prerogative, that's what they decided to do...

KL: Yes, that's not that you...

DC: Not a joint venture as such, no.

KL: No, OK. Right.

DC: An I'm not even sure...it'd 'ave to be a very big project to 'ave 2 firms our size to do it, erm...

KL: Yes, yeah.

SN: An do you...do you like working for the main subcontractor, or do you prefer working for the client?

DC: It depends, I don't mind actually. Either way. Erm...

SN: Either way?

DC: Yeah. I mean obviously erm the bigger jobs tend to be with the main contractors. Y'know there the one where it's maybe multi million pound projects that they're dealing with.

SN: Mmm.

DC: Erm, but if it's...y'know, that can 'ave it's faults as well. If you've just one big customer, if it all breaks down it can go a bit sour. If you spread your risk over maybe 10 medium sized domestic clients...

SN: Yeah.

DC: Means more work for me and Simon, cos then we've got 5 different customers each to keep 'appy, whereas if we've just got one main contractor, that's a bit easier! So, you know, we just take each job on its merits. When it turns up on our desk to tender, we just try and price it fairly and see where it leads us.

KL: Uh huh. Do you find there's a difference in terms of getting paid? To the type of work?

DC: Yeah. More often than not either a domestic client you get paid a lot s...y'know, a lot quicker.

KL: Right.

DC: A lot less haggling. Sayin' that, we've had haggles with both types. Erm...you normally tell from the start whether the job's gonna, y;know, go well on that basis.

KL: Uh huh

DC: Touch wood, to be fair, this year we've 'ad a good year. In the past we've 'ad some, y'kno, ruthless, like I say, main contractors or clients who just tryin' to get one over on ya. So you tend to be a bit more wary these days that you used to be.

KL: So is it just that they're slow paying, or they're actually challenging what you're asking them?

DC: I think so yeah, yeah. They all....their expectations either change once the final account's gone in, and say 'oh I didn't expect that' and this, that and the other, or erm...I think it's just more of a cultural thing these days, where people they and get...more knocked off, they try and play the game a bit more, y'know.

KL: And do you find very often that things do crop up which you haven't expected, which are going to make a difference therefore to the final...

DC: Yeah, oh yes for sure. Yeah.

KL: And is that particularly on the more heritage side of things, or?

DC: Erm...no, not necessarily. No it can 'appen in any particular sector. I mean with the new build house we're doin' at the minute, y'know, it's been all shoddily controlled from the start. Poor drawings, no specification, all sorts of extras cropping up. The architect denies all liability sorta thing. Main contractor, the builder's got 'is 'ead in 'is 'ands half the time, thinking 'well we didn't price for this, didn't price for that'. Y'know, and that's on a new build, which you think'd be very easy to specify exactly what needs doin'. But they didn't put the legwork in to start with, drawin' up y'know a comprehensive specification or schedule of work. She just drew a new house on some drawings and labeled a few

bits and pieces and assumed everybody else would know exactly what goes on into makin' this house. So erm, it can be, y'know, you got to make sure that when you priced it, you've maybe covered yourself with some little caveats in your quotes, sayin' we 'aven't allowed for this, we 'aven't done that.

KL: Mmm.

DC: You know.

SN: Do you think specifications are getting less and less detailed?

DC: I think so, yeah.

SN: Right.

DC: It maybe starts with a client that's not prepared to put as much money into the initial, y'know... surveying or the architectural input.

SN: With erm, with things like churches, do you....well, in general, do you tend to find that the architect is quite an important person?

DC: Mmm.

SN: That they y'know, they might choose who to tender to, they might be, y'know, have the relationship with the client sometimes...

DC: Erm, yes, but they'll no doubt have to y'know make sure they go out to tender, like I say, for public sector work, they've got to get the best deal for the PCC as such, 'aven't they?

SN: Mmm.

DC: Erm...

SN: But they could pick three joiners that are used to working to your level of quality, or they could pick somebody like you and then two other joiners that would do it cheaper. So, you know they have that choice don't they?

DC: Yeah, they do. I mean workin' on Bradford Cathedral at the minute is with an architect we've worked for previously, when she was part of another practice. Although we are employed by the main contractor, she approached us originally at the outset, hoping for us to price the whole job as main contractor. But it was a bit beyond our capability. There was a lot more management involved, there was a lot more of the trades involved. Which was ideal for another builder, which I proposed. The won the job and we were pricin' to them for the joinery so it worked out quite well.

SN: Ok.

DC: An that's 'ad a few little, y'know, sorta variations on the original schedule crop up along the way, but up to now touch wood they've ben fine. An they 've realised what they've askedus to do wasn't necessarily possible given the budget that we'd tendered for. So they've gone back to the client an said 'listen...' y'know. It was always a grey area of this particular aspect...

SN: Right

DC: As long as they build in enough contingencies into the original sorta budget....

KL: Uh huh

DC: Hopefully then everybody comes out happy with the job, everybody gets paid accordingly, and it's y'know, deemed a success.

KL: Do you usually have an idea of the budget when you're putting in for the tender?

DC: No, no.

KL: So it's just going in blind really.

DC: Yeah, t'is, yeah. T'is really.

SN: With the job in Middlesborough...do you think that that might happen? Y'know that...do you feel like there is err an opportunity for the budget to change?

DC: Not necessarily cos in the main, it started off just as a supply only. So they came to us, 100 windows like this, what's your price?

SN: Right OK.

DC: So, it was quite straightforward. It sort of developed from there a little bit differently. But in the main, so, that's quite straightforward enough. We had to sorta negotiate a price at the very start cos it was more than it was what they intended to spend, or allowed in their tender to spend...

SN: Mmmm.

DC: But we were happy to do that cos it was a good sizable chunk of work and at the right time of year for us. Given the work load we 'ad. So... erm, I know for a fact the main contractor has struggled with other areas of the project.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: Which hadn't been budgeted for.

SN: I think with the HLF they are quite strict about their initial budget. They make a grant offer, and then that's...

DC: Yeah, I'm not quite sure how it works, but erm, erm, just a comment that the site manager said, that the firm was 'avin' to...Bridgwater Buildersf were 'avin' to take a big hit. On the project because of something... Somebody's got it tied up in a contract somewhere where there was this sposed to be paid for, and they've not... Something's happened. And they've got to carry the cost. But err, thankfully it's not backfired onto us.

SN: Yeah

DC: That's what happens on building sites, you know. I've never ever been on a job where everything's gone exactly to plan. Y'know there always been extras, there's always, y'know, never been enough allowed for in the first place. Not, not the client has an unreasonable expectation of cost, cos the original surveyor or architect has said 'oh that's alright, this job'll cost ya £300,000'. So they're expecting tenders to come in at £300,000 and it's not, they've all come in at £500,000. So, y'know... I think there's a bit of...well I'm not sure what it is... I think, to be fair, in the last generation... The times I've been working in the office, there hasn't been any real sort of inflation in the prices for the last 15, 20 years, where there shoulda been you see. So when you hit a recession, people still want it cheaper again.

KL: Yeah.

DC: An then....I think that's why a lot of firms getting' rid of their staff, cos there hasn't been enough profit made in the good times, to sustain the workforce. I mean, to be fair, if we were to run a true business model, we would 'ave laid our chaps of 2 years ago when really there was not the workload.

SN: Why do you think that then? Why do you think that prices haven't gone up in the good times?

DC: Because a that, that client and architect...they think hey know the, the cost...quality...quality, quantity surveyors. They know the price of everything but the value of nothing. So they think 100 linear metres of this, that and the other is £8 a metre. Every year goes by they think it's £8 a metre. But, it's not. It's probably nearer £15 a metre. Y'know....year by year there's just...because of competitive tendering, because you're always 'avin' to get the lowest price in, there's never any chance for inflation.

SN: Apart from where the materials are?

DC: Yeah but then they just, they just see... Well they think they know the cost, so... They think a box window should always be £500 pounds. But it isn't, it's like 1500 pounds.

KL: But presumably firms must be, well they're not obviously learning are they? They're not readjusting their expectations through the process...

DC: Mmm

KL: Because there must be firms who are prepared to come down...

DC: Well that's...there's always, there's always somebody who'll say 'yes I'll do it for that', because they're afraid of where the next job might come from ya see.

KL: So it's better to have some money coming than not?

DC: Mmmm...well that's been certainly the problem with the recession, the last few years. You know, you do jobs at cost or less cos y'know, if that's all you've got to do, it's better than nothing.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

DC: Y'know, it's a difficult one to discuss when we're havin' such a hard time. I mean you're...it probably, it will be the worst recession we've ever seen in our generation and beyond probably.

KL: Mmmm

DC: Erm, there just isn't enough work in quantity, and maybe enough erm y'know clients with the sort of, the reasonable attitude that they'll pay for a good job with, y'know, happy to pay at a level where the bus...sort of the business is profitable. I mean, they've got to appreciate that firms somewhere down the line 'ave got to make a profit from this.

KL: Yeah.

DC: But, err, you know, everybody's bound by tight budgets and lack of money and lack of spending, or lack of whatever. They've always gotta go for the cheapest...the tender enquiries we get say 'we are not bound to accept the cheapest tender', but show me a tender application that's always gone to the second best of third best. Never 'appens.

KL: Mmmm...did you (to SN) want to ask about materials?

SN: Yeah, I want to ask a couple of things really, about...one about materials and where you tend to get them from, erm, so...

DC: Well in the main we just have a relatively close network of suppliers. We'll be buyin' either timber, including sheet materials, glass, we do a lot of windows, so whether it be single glazing or double glazing, erm, then the sort of ancillary products like your adhesives and your paints, and bits and pieces. More often than not we just keep using the same supplier, well I say the same supplier, it changes maybe...whenever they've let us down, or, y'know the prices are too unreasonable. We don't always...we don't always, we sort of...

Tea interruption

DC: We try and do the decent thing, we don't always go to the cheapest price. We look for what customers are looking for in us, which is better customer service and quality, you know. And if it's been right the time before then we'll do that again.

SN: Right.

DC: Erm, recently, with this job for Stuart Park, which was making a lot of windows, there's a lot of hard wood to buy in, it's very costly, and so our regular supplier...we exceeded our credit limit on the account, y'know by about 3-fold, cos it was a lot of timber to buy in. But they were right by us, cos we've been right by them over the years.

SN: Mmm

DC: So we 'ave that relationship, if it works for everybody else, they let us 'ave the timber, erm, and the terms were met, we paid up and everybody's happy. Y'know we could've got that timber cheaper elsewhere if we'd gone off to a brand new supplier, but y'know, why should we give our order to a new cus...to a new supplier, let's our existing supplier be the beneficiaries and they'll look after us with the terms of the credit and ongoing *muffled*

SN: Mmm. And are they are local supplier?

DC: They're relatively local yeah. They've got y'know depots Sheffield, Leeds, Hull. They haven't got a depot in York, but err... But they're like big sorta major timber suppliers.

SN: And do you know where they get their timber from?

DC: Err, well they import it themselves from wherever. Be it Scandinavia or Europe...

SN: Right. And what sort of wood are you using? Do you mind me asking?

DC: No not at all. It depends you see. The windows for Stuart Park were all hardwood meranti...

SN: Meranti.

DC: The windows we're makin' now for a place in Leeds is just Scandinavian redwood. Oak, pew and altar that we're making, err, it's English oak for Bradford Cathedral. Erm...

SN: Does the architect specify the type of wood or do you kind of get involved in that?

DC: It depends. It can be a bit of both. With the windows for Stuart Park, all 'e wanted was a sustainable hardwood, so that was what we proposed. 'E just wanted Scandinavian redwood for the windows in Leeds, and err, it just wanted to be English oak for Bradford Cathedral. So, that's what the architect specified. In the past, when we do domestic work for Mr and Mrs Smith's, who want a wardrobe makin' or a kitchen makin', we might say 'well let's do this out of tulip

wood, let's do this out of mahogany, let's do this...', y'know. Their quite happy....some people have ideas what they want, some people are quite happy to be led.

SN: We've found that...we've found, erm, some people talkin' about getting involved in the design almost, so if somebody wants a new architrave, erm, there's, y'know, they might propose what might be suited to that era of building.

DC: Uh huh.

SN: And I just wondered if you ever got involved in that sort of way?

DC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. More often that not they just want to match something else that they've already got an idea of. So, like I say, goin' back to what I said before, that can be done. We have got cutters or we have cutters made. Erm...but yeah, we'll always work closely with clients if they've got ideas of their own.

SN: Uh huh

DC: The amount a times...I mean staircases is one that crops up more often than not. They've got their own ideas what they want in a staircase, they've photographs, this, that and the other, erm, so yeah. Somebody's tryin' the front door. Bear with me a second...that's why we 'ave plastic front doors, cos it makes people want to use timber.

KL: Ah ha ha.

DC: They don't really work very well. You've just got to press down..... *interruption while speaks to person at door.*

SN: And when you do erm do designs like that, is it you kind of decide on the designs with the client and give it to the guys in the workshop and they produce it?

DC: Uh huh, yeah.

SN: And is there any...do you think there's anybody in the workshop that might go on to do something like what you do?

DC: Well we're trainin' up one a the lads...he's at college at the minute doing a construction studies course

SN: Oh OK

DC: With the intention of... 'e does one day a week in the office. 'E goes to college on a Thursday and on a Friday 'e's in the office, so 'e picks up bits and pieces. We're sort of coaching 'im the role of going out to measure up for jobs and...

SN: Right

DC: And liaise with clients, and price work. Book keeping, that kind of thing.

SN: Why him? Is it because he wants to, is it because...

DC: Well we sort...we 'ad a need for a third person in the office anyway cos Simon's nearing retirement an I can't do it all, there'll be too much for meself to do on me own.

SN: Mmm.

DC: Richard realises, to be fair, that his skills are best in the office than in the workshop.

SN: Oh really?

DC: Yeah, 'e likes it, 'e likes it in there, but ideally we sorta realise 'e'll be a good estimator stroke contract manager.

KL: What sort of age is he? Or, how long as he been here?

DC: 'E's been with us since 'e left school and 'is apprenticeship, and 'e's now 22.

KL: Right, yeah, so 'e's...

DC: '88. What year we in now? 'E'll be 24 next year. So, yeah, an 'e's now on is second year of a three year I think it is.

SN: An 'e's doing that at York as well?

DC: Yeah.

SN: Right OK. It's interesting isn't it, you can do that in a small company. That y'know, you know who the best person for the job is.

DC: Yeah, well a couple of lads shown an interest when I says 'who wants to go to college and learn a new skill?'. And 2 put their hands up, and err, and one of the lads who wanted to would a been excellent at it but 'e's also excellent in the workshop, and it would be a shame to lose 'im in the workshop as well.

SN: Oh OK.

DC: And I said 'well I'm not goin' to send you both to college at the same time, and lose you both for 1, for the same day each week' etc etc.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: We'll just do Richard first and then we'll see what goes from there.

SN: OK.

DC: But err, don't wanna do meself out of a job!

SN: Hahaha!

DC: I don't wanna end up goin' back in the workshop!

SN: True...do you think it's important that somebody works in the workshop though, before coming in the office?

DC: Oh definitely. Definitely.

SN: So Simon's been in the workshop...

DC: Yeah well Simon was a joiner for y'know for years, before 'e followed 'is dad into the office.

SN: Oh really?

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SN: Right OK.

DC: An I think it's essential.

SN: That's interesting.

DC: I think there's probably scope for adding an extra...err somebody within the office who's purely, like I say, sales and marketing...

SN: Mmm.

DC: If you try and get beyond the sort of scale of business we're at...

KL: Mmm.

DC: You know, an on the road salesman of sorts, but erm, somebody who y'know, looks for...is more driven towards business opportunities rather than day to day sort a running of joinery and what goes on.

KL: Do you do anything on...

DC: I do yeah, I try an squeeze as much in as I can. The, the advent of the internet and things like that, makes that a lot easier to sort of try and put yourself under people's noses without having to actually go out an do it. Y'know...

KL: Do you get much business do you know? From the internet?

DC: I think so...yeah, we do yeah.

KL: I mean you've got quite a nice lot of information on there haven't you?

DC: Yeah.

KL: ...a brochure and...

DC: Yeah well from the outset we put a bit of....made sure we got our website out there relatively early in the dawn of the internet and things. We recently updated it and try and keep it as fresh and as sort of as modern as possible. And at the same time try and reflect what we do.

KL: Mmm.

DC:y'know traditionally as a firm. So we're quite proud a that. It does give customers who don't know you confidence...

KL: Yes.

DC: If they're turnin' to you for the first time...

KL: Uh huh.

DC: And erm, so yeah, it does 'ave a benefit. There's no doubt about it.

KL: Presumably you had to get somebody in to do that...

DC: Yeah, yeah...

KL You decided what the content would be...

DC: Basically yeah. I mean what it, it basically started off with our own sort of A4...photographs we had, we started to print them out, put a little blurb with them and have it as a brochure. Well we've just turned that into visual format.

KL: Uh huh.

DC: So people can actually download their own brochure now. They can just look at various aspects of what we do, maybe doors, windows, staircases, and see samples of our work basically.

KL: Mmm.

DC: Come the day when the industry regenerates itself and gets going again, hopefully we might 'ave a...keep us ahead of everybody else.

KL: Mmm, uh huh.

SN: When you said about, err having somebody that could go out and find business opportunities it made me think a little bit about growth, and have you, have you always maintained a kind of core of 12 people? Or has that seen...

DC: Yeah, to be fair we 'ave yeah. I mean it's not much, not oft...y'know....I would say it's gone...at it's lowest it's maybe 'ad... Well we used to 'ave a lot more secretaries, an we used to 'ave like 4 in the office. A couple a ladies, an Simon, an 'is dad.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: An when Simon's dad passed away, it was just as I was startin' in the business, so again there was 3 or 4 in the office. But computers put paid to one secretary and the other one retired. So you're lookin'...I'm secretarial, and everything.

KL: Yeah, we're the same!

DC: So, there's probably more joiners in the workshop now than there have been in the past.

KL: Oh right.

SN: Right

DC: But then it's a relatively young workforce. I mentioned Didier's been 'ere since 'e was a school leaver, and 'e's mid-50s. Next lad is mid-40s. So the older generation of joiners, unfortunately died off, well and retired. But err... You do well to make retirement! Everybody else seems to die I'm afraid. But yeah, erm. So we're a youngish....a good spread to be fair, from y'know Zac who's just 17., a couple of lads in their 20s, couple a lads in their mid-30s, a couple of lads in their mid-40s and Didier in 'is mid-50s. So...

SN: That is a good spread isn't it?

DC: It is really. Clive who's the third director who you've not met yet. There's me and Simon and Clive. Clive's me uncle. He's late 50s. An he oversees everything in the workshop.

SN: Oh ok.

DC: He's like, y'know, workshop foreman.

KL: Right.

DC: So, a technical aspect, he's the one that keeps on top of...y'know, anything happens with the joinery trade. Any manufacturing developments, bits and pieces like that. Hands on.

SN: OK. It's probably important to have somebody like that isn't it?

DC: Well yeah, for sure, yeah. I mean that's probably the next stage...Richard is coming into the office to help with the workload when Simon retires, but there'll come a point where Clive retires, and there'll be a need for somebody who's responsible for just y'know, seeing what happens within the 9 to 5 within the sort of industry.

SN: Mmm.

DC: And a technical standpoint. Y'know, whether it be materials, or techniques, or that kid of thing. But you know, they're all excellent. They're all excellent joiners, all excellent craftsmen.

SN: Are they all from York?

DC: Yeah, uh huh.

SN: Right.

DC: Yeah.

SN: Erm, the other thing I was gonna ask you about it CSkills. And err, you're a member of CSkills?

DC: Uh huh.

SN: And ust, wh...how supportive you felt the organisation was? Like what you get out of it in terms of sort of networking and support, yeah.

DC: Errm, to be fair, I don't often feel I 'ave the need to turn to 'em, until it came to takin' on an apprentice really. You're always aware that they're there...yeah, like I say, it's only when you're getting an apprentice turn up and you think 'right, ok then, we'll get in touch with CITB as it was'. And erm, said 'right we've got an apprentice, want to enroll 'im on a course'. Erm obviously there's benefits of doin' that, sort of grants you get back off them, erm... But you sort of always regard them as a training body rather than an overall joinery specific federation or organisation.

SN: Right

DC: Erm, and we don't subscribe to any of the others. Y'know the British Woodworking Federation or anything like that. Always found that was just money for old rope. So...

SN: What about the older ones like the guild of...

DC: York Guild of Building?

SN: And there's one in London...the Carpenters' Guild...

DC: Yeah it's something that really doesn't.... I don't know why, it just...

SN: It just doesn't get you at all.

DC: Don't get...I mean y'know, if we were...I know some firms and some directors, they love to be part a that, and they go off hobnobbing and networking and all these things, and it's just never been our sort a way really. I think I pick up, take it off Simon really, 'e's never been that interested. His dad and my granddad used to be in all the York Guild a Buildings, and y'know... An back in them days it was Masonic sort of associations wasn't it, where they all sort of feed off each other, whether their builders or wood carvers, or whatever it may be. So erm, but yeah, it's not one a them things really.

SN: Right OK.

KL: What about things like the chamber of commerce. You know, broader business groups.

DC: No, not really. I get invited to the odd thing by the bank manager, whether it be York commerce, or some... Yeah. I don't...I'm sure it would 'ave some benefits if I just 'ad the time or inclination to do it to be fair.

KL: Mmmm.

DC: That's why I think maybe that extra member of staff who was, y'know...

SN: Business...

DC: Yeah, who's got that sort a mentality.

KL: Mmmm

DC: Y'know, so... you never know.

SN: So when it does come to finding new suppliers or new materials or things like that, what do you rely on? Like word of mouth?

DC: Yeah, its to do with that, yeah. I mean you keep in close contact with people you work with. I mean if you strike up a relationship with somebody and you think you get on well, you trust their judgment, you turn to 'em for this and that. Obviously word of mouth for sure.

SB: Company there, Laver's as just been in.

DC: Oh is that Laver's rep?

SB: Laver's rep yep. And we've dealt with them for 70 years, 80 years. They used to give us 6 months credit at one time. And this guy's just realising 'ow long....doesn't make any difference really...

DC: We were talking about the wood supplies for this job, and that was Laver's you see.

SB: Laver's again. But they used to 'ave reps, but they don't 'ave reps these days do they? Just the telephone or the internet. We dealt them 'em a long time.

DC: Is that all 'e's brought ya? A planner?

SB: And a calendar. No wine for us or anything like that. Hope the bottle's on the way.

DC: I'll be e-mailing Greg.

SB: Hahaha.

SN: Yeah, and the only other thing I was interested in was, sort of, the quality of the work, and if there as certain types of work that maybe you and the people in the workshop preferred?

DC: Mmmm.

SN: Like nice jobs. Jobs that motivate you maybe, I don't know.

DC: Well yeah, for sure. That's y'know, but some jobs motivate others in different ways. Y'know, some of the lads really like to get stuck into nitty-gritty site work, some lads might just like to, y'know, hand make their thing at their bench, take some time over it, make sure it's the first rate product.

SN: What do you mean by 'nitty-gritty site work'?

DC: Well they might be, y'know, puttin' up stoothing walls, or fixing a load of skirting and architrave, the sort of site community of plasterers, electricians and... A bit more goes on... I mean it's quite... you can hear it in there (*the workshop*) it's very quiet. There might be a bit a radio goin' on, there might be a machine goin' on. Sometimes it can be quite, quite a dull place, and then you get a building site where it's all 'appening.

SN: Right

KL: They just like the kind of camaraderie..

DC: Yeah. There's that. When you're a younger lad I think that's what they look for.

KL: Yeah.

DC: A bit more. And then when you've got something nice to make, there's like an oak altar in there which hasn't necessarily gone to plan, but y'know, you can tell Didier's enjoyed makin' it. Whether it be book cases or windows or... I like to think they all take a lot of pride in how it's finished. Erm... you soon find out who's not that bothered.

KL: Yes, so presumably you kind of pick up on that and then respond in terms of who does what...

DC: Yeah, yeah. Nobody likes tidying up. If you walk in there and have a look you'll see that nobody's that bothered about keeping the place tidy. Erm, but err....yeah.

SN: OK. Well I think that's all the questions I've got...

DC: Is that of interest? Is that of use?

SN: Yeah it is.

KL: Can I just ask one last thing, because briefly mentioned it... Do you have things like health and safety policies, and deal with risk assessments?

DC: Yeah.

KL: Is that erm, is it becoming more demanding in that area? Y'know, more requirements to fulfill?

DC: Mmm, definitely, yeah.

KL: And is that something that you just get and...

DC: Just get on...

KL: ...cope with, cos you have to?

DC: Yeah. Exactly, erm. Yeah it's a pain but it's a, a necessary e-mail I spose.

KL: I spose everybody's in the same...

DC: The annoying thing for us is, y'know, like I say, we've 'ad generations of lads come through out workshop, and barely...well certainly no serious accidents, serious accidents, and barely, very infrequently anything minor. Y'know, as minor as a decent sized splinter or anything, y'know.

KL: Uh huh...

DC: No lost limbs, no eye injuries or anything...

SB: Shhh, be quiet.

DC: I know! Touch wood. So when you've got mountains of paperwork to fill out, and well you think, y'know 'our record stands there'. But, erm, risk assessments, method statements, erm, yeah. They're all part and parcel I'm afraid.

KL: And is that for all client types.

DC: Well mainly when you're going onto big y'know erm building sites and such like. Domestic clients very rarely get involved, unless it's of a certain size, and they've maybe employed a surveyor to oversee the job, or an architect's instigated it.

KL: So they would...

DC: Yeah.

KL: ...seek similar...

DC: Yeah. But to be fair, for our trade, there's very, relatively few little risks to try and consider and negate sort a thing.

KL: Uh huh. What about insurance? Do you have to...

DC: ...yeah..

KL: ...err insurance requirements?

DC: Yeah, yeah. We 'ave all that to sort out. So we just, again, work with a local broker that comes and assess us, and gets it all underwritten and y'know, there's certain levels of indemnities I'm sure you'll know that we 'ave to meet. Whichever client we're looking to work for, so...

KL: Uh huh, ok... I think that's it I think. Thanks very much.

SN: Yeah, thanks a lot.

Ken Walton, Firm07GB. December 6th 2011

KL: It's working...

SN: Is it? OK good

KL: You don't mind do you?

KW: No, no, no, no

KL: You just can't write quick enough...

SN: Can't catch everything. So yeah, I'm just gonna introduce us all even though I've listened to it loads now. But it's Sophie Norton and Kim Loader talking to Ken Walton, erm on the 6th of December. You know me, and I'm interested in craft and conservation, and the training of craftspeople. Kim is interested in small and medium sized businesses and the kind of wider construction supply chain, with a special interest in the public sector. Erm, so that's why we're working together to find out a bit more about how erm you engage and make your business work in, erm, you know, the wider supply chain influence. OK, so, cos of my interest in training and stuff like that, I just wanted to ask you about how you came to be where you are, and maybe how some of the guys that work with you came to be as skilled as they are...

KW: Well I originally left school, if you're going that far back...

SN: We are!

KW: ...and joined the marines...

SN: Oh really?

KW: I was a Royal Marine for so long, yeah. Didn't enjoy it, left, erm, I wouldn't say I bummed around cos I only ever had 3 weeks on the dole, and then I went straight into a job and when I actually got first pay packet, for my first job, I sent the...I got £8.35 for 3 weeks. And I sent them the cheque back, so I've never 'ad a, never 'ad a penny off the government. In 30 odd years now. And then, to get my trainin' as a bricklayer, which I trained initially as, I actually just kept knocking on people's doors and sending letters. And that's 'ow I got me apprenticeship, cos I was late.

SN: Yeah...

KW: To get the apprenticeship. I'd be 17, 17 and a half, summit like that.

SN: Mmm

KW: An then through the brickwork originally I just wanted to do, which you as an apprentice, loads of brickwork, fancy brickwork, and then just sort a, really, I wouldn't say stumbled on it, cos my father was a builder, my nephew's a mason as well at Dearing House, erm, and my dad sorta worked for a large masonry company, as a bricklayer, and 'e kept always telling me about masonry works an 'ow it's more interesting. 'E worked for Longdon's of Sheffield, which a massive...they originally built Sheffield Town Hall, so it was a big company. They 'ad over 200 bricklayers alone, nevermind other trades. Maybe over a thousand people worked for 'em. This is in the 60s.

SN: Right.

KW: An it's me dad that got me into lime works an what 'ave you. An then I just decided to go back and train as a stonemason basically.

SN: Right.

KW: Funded that all myself. I paid for myself to go back to college.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: For the 3 years. Part way through that find out about West Dean, did a couple of courses myself, then was asked to 'elp teach in the workshops. An it just went from there really, y'know just carried on. I think I spend, not so much now cos I think I done most training I can, probably for the first 3 or 4 years, 5, 6, 7 thousand pound a year of me own money...

SN: Really?

KW: ...to do my trainin' myself. Which is why I need to get the money back now as such, cos I think I put the money in and I've put the efforts in. I've been, y'know, through err Essex Council, I've done courses with those. Up to Charlestown, West Dean, I've been...most of the courses that you can sort of find, I've gone on either one or two of the courses. To try and gel everything off all the different opinions into a, what I think we are now as such.

SN: Yeah.

KW: Y'know...

KL: Is that while you were working for other firms, you just...

KW: No. I started on my own in 1997, erm I was a subcontractor before that. Did my brickwork and then I became a self employed bricklayer working for other firms. Err, and then, the real buzz that hit me with a real buzz, I went to work for a company called Robert Laing and Son in Pickering. An my first job with 'im, we built extensions to Ampleforth Church, which was all in stonework. And it was then that I realised I prefer stone basically.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: You get to a point where you get a little brain dead just wallin' the same brick all day, everyday. And I think a lot of...a lot of times with the bricklayin' side of it, it's how much you can do in a day to a reasonable standard, compared to with the stonemasonry, it's how good a quality you can do.

KL: Mmmm

KW: Sorta, it changes, y'know the parameters change.

SN: Right

KW: Because a bricklayer's known by how many bricks he can wall in a day. That's basically how you're gauged really.

SN: So who did you work for when you did your first apprenticeship?

KW: I worked for a company in Pickering, Rosedale Homes.

SN: And they're new build mainly?

KW: They were new build but mostly in stonework, random stonework.

SN: Oh ok.

KW: It's very rare we did brick built buildings, cos Pickering and the area was...

SN: ...yeah, national park isn't it?

KW: National park. So, when I left those, the company I went to...I went to work for Paxton's actually at Scarborough, and is was mas...

KL: The coach, the coach people?

KW: Yeah, but actually they owned a building firm. They were sister companies.

KL: Oh right!

KW: It's gone now, Paxton's Building's no longer. It was Paxton's builders were the original buil, were the original company. And the coach works were the outshoot, or the off shoot of those.

KL: Oh goodness.

KW: But then the coach works got bigger.

KL: Yeah.

KW: They originally built, Paxton's originally built the, the piers for the valley bridge.

KL: Oh right, yeah.

KW: So they were, they an ol...well they were Hunters before that, but they were an old company.

KL: Uh huh.

KW: Which I don't know what valley bridge is, it'll be Victorian won't it. 19, early 1900s.

KL: Yes I would think so, yeah.

KW: Late 1900s, early 20th century. Err, and then they closed obviously. Erm, and it was that sort a point, what do I do? What company do I find that'll be interested in, and Laings said they 'ad this church to build and I went to work for them.

SN: And that's when you started doing the qualifications at college at the same time?

KW: No, no, no that was back in the mid-80s was that. '87, '88, '89, worked for them up to about '92, erm, went to work for David Harrison's, on stonework. Renovating 'ouses. I worked at Whitwell Hall and Whitwell Coaching Stables for David 'Arrison, which was mostly stonework. Then when 'Arrison's wanted everybody that was subcontracted to go back on the books, we couldn't be self-employed anymore for 'em, which was '97, I decided I didn't wanna go back on the books. It was quite a reasonable, it was 2 or 3 pound an hour wage cut, but we were gonnna get holidays you see.

SN: Mmmm

KW: An I decided I didn't want to do that, an that's when I branched out on me own. And so about '97, '98 was when I started doin' my courses.

SN: Right, OK.

KW: Which started at Orton Trust, which then, was then York stonemasonry, erm, I say, Essex Council. I think it was Pauline Hudson...have you heard of her? Essex Council, they do quite a lot of...

SN: I've heard of Essex Council, but I'm not sure about, was it Pauline or Paul?

KW: I'm sure it was Pauline. It was a lady Hudson anyway. She's let now, she's left since. But again, when I went to those it, erm, they were very new themselves, the courses, they'd maybe only done 1 or 2 courses themselves before

that. As such, so they were on a learning curve as well, of 'ow to teach students, an... Y'know, the people were, the craftsmen, they weren't teachers themselves.

KL: Mmm

KW: Y'know, they weren't used to the classroom environment. But, y'know, they did fairly well. And now, they're very good courses I understand. So, I think I was getting in at the time when some of these 'eritage courses were new as well...

SN: Yeah, possibly.

KW: I think I did one at Orton Trust back in '97, and I think Rory Young...it was a lime mortar course, and I think 'e'd only ever done 2 before that...

SN: Really?

KW: So 'e'd only started '95, '96 'imself. Even though 'e'd done lime before that, but 'e'd only just started these courses.

SN: Yeah.

KW: Teachin' the courses as such. So I got in quite early, y'know quite early I think.

SN: Did you do anything at the University, at York?

KW: I've only done parts of the MSc, y'know, where the public can come in.

SN: Yeah, yeah.

KW: That's all I've done at King's Manor.

SN: Did you do the lime week?

KW: Err, no, I didn't do the lime week. I've done the stone week, and the brickwork week.

SN: Right OK.

KW: Erm, the lime week, it was Rory Young that was doing the lime week up at Ryedale, erm...

SN: Folk Museum...

KW: Folk Museum. And I'd just done the 3 days with Rory the week before that..

SN: Oh right.

KW: ...at Orton. And 'e knew where I was from, and 'e said 'can you supply me some lime?'. So I supplied the lime for the, at the Ryedale Folk Museum.

SN: Oh OK.

KW: That's 'ow we got to know each other, an went out for meals with 'im, an chatted. But I've not spoke to Rory now for 10 years maybe.

SN: Really?

KW: Yeah, so, I mean, 'e's a nice chap. 'E got me some work...

SN: Hahaha. And how about the others, how about the people that work with you?

KW: Erm, well Jake that we've took on the last few months, erm, 'e's trained at York Minster..

SN: OK.

KW: So 'e's done 'is training, but 'e's keen to go a little bit further.

SN: Uh huh

KW: The other 2 lads, I 'ave 2 which are bricklayers, trained bricklayers and 'ave done their... So they do any new build, erm roofin' works for us.

SN: Right.

KW: I 'ad Frank who's a trained plasterer, and myself and John do most of the lime plaster works.

SN: Right

KW: An then 'ave a proper labourer, 2 joiners and then Kev and Ian that's down there. I've took them as like improvers. So, maybe next year, if things pick up a bit, if there's more trainin' funds available, I'll start an send them on courses.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: Even though a lot a the work's in-house trainin'.

SN: Uh huh

KW: Cos I think I can deliver as much trainin' as....they don't get a certificate at the end of it, but I think I can deliver as much trainin' as need be. So, I've spoke recently to Heritage Craft Alliance and we might think about doin' an OSAT for these guys later. Next year, summit like that.

SN: Right.

KW: So then you've got some qualification. But they're keen to do...I think with the lime works especially, or the masonry, you need an original basic, y'know like a bricklayer or a stonemason, I think you need a grounding in that, which these lads 'ave got. Cos you can't just bring a lad in to start and do lime work, unless 'e's got good hand an eye coordination, and basic skills with 'is 'ands.

SN: Mmmm

KW: These lads 'ave now, an it's just a case of up, upping their, their skills level.

SN: So, are most of them apprenticeship trained?

KW: Jake is, Matty is. Who, Jake's a stonemason, another stonemason. Erm, Matty's a trained, apprentice trained plasterer. And the two bricklayer lads, Clive and Jim, they're apprentice trained bricklayers.

SN: But the improvers aren't?

KW: No.

SN: And the joiners?

KW: The joiners are trained yeah, apprentice trained yeah.

SN: Right, so it's just the two improvers that aren't?

KW: Yes, yeah.

SN: And I....how old are they?

KW: Ian is 56 I think, and Kev is 51.

SN: Right OK

KW: But they, y'know, they've been in the buildin' trade most a the time.

SN: Yeah.

KW: Ian, the bigger guy down there, 'e's erm 'e's a professional golfer really! Hahaha. 'E spent so long in Germany, then came back and decided 'e didn't like it, so erm, they're good 'ands, y'know. As long as I'm on site with 'em, and tellin' 'em what to do, they're good lads in that...I don't wanna sound nasty to 'em but I can't leave them too long on their own in case....part of a wall's gonna fall down or somethin' like that.

SN: Yeah.

KW: So this is where I think, once I get a bit more money, or some trainin' for 'em somewhere, I'll train them up and it'll give them a bit more confidence.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: That they...that I've given them, I'm interested in their training. I've given them some more input sorta thing.

SN: Yeah.

KW: Which we are keen, next year, hopefully to see what funding's about, erm and try and upskill them.

SN: Right

KW: As such. And they'll get more money once their upskilled, there'll get more money as such...

SN: Yeah. Everyone wins.

KW: Yeah. But just at the moment, I think to take more people on... I think there's an abundance of trained people that aren't in work anymore. A lot of big companies 'ave been laying...

SN: People off...

KW: People off, yeah. So, erm, you know next year we could be pricin' for half a million pound jobs, but we just need the people in place as such.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: Which they're out there now aren't they?

SN: Hopefully...

KW: Yeah.

SN: ...they are yeah.

KW: Unless they go out the industry altogether. Y'know, their lost and go and find other jobs completely different. But I do think they're out there. It's just findin' the right ones.

SN: That's what other people have said, haven't they? That we've spoken to.

KW: Yeah.

SN: Somebody told us that Laing O'Rourke's, Laing's...

KW: Laing's, yeah

SN: ...they had a big stonemasonry division...when they got rid or it, lots of stonemasons set up around Carlisle. So I think it happens.

KW: Yeah, well, Linford...

SN: Linford's yeah.

KW: They've fell off. Caps and Caps 'ave gone...

SN: Caps and Caps?

KW: Yeah they did a lot of church work. Who else 'as gone? Stone West are just hanging on. St Blaise have gone.

SN: Right.

KW: Erm, there's another one, I can't remember which one it was. Ratty and Kett.

SN: Yep

KW: Think they've gone. So, y'know, there's...we've been asked to move, to go to Northampton...

SN: Really?

KW: ..and do work in Northampton. Yeah, cos apparently quite a lot of smaller companies 'ave gone bust in and around that area, and the chap that we're workin' for, or who's specifying the work for us at the Peverill

Diocese....This...Peverill only 'ave...this is one of 4 estates, and the largest estate's in Northampton...

SN: Right

KW: So they find it 'ard it get people to do work down there. And their happy with the work that we've done over at the Dog and Duck you see, so they're sayin' are you interested in actually startin' up down there. Y'know travelling...

SN: And would you?

KW: Once a week maybe, if we did 3 or 4 days and then come back again.

SN: But it's not something you're used to doing?

KW: When I work with David 'Arrison's yeah I worked allover the country with 'em yeah.

SN: But as...

KW: As it is now no, cos I've got a young family now, and I don't wanna... I work to live, not live to work. Even though a lot a the times it is basically livin' to work at the moment, there's that much paperwork and what have ya. If it comes an we 'ave to do it, we'll do it. Sorta thing. The lads are prepared to do it. It's a different world now int it?

KL: Mmmm

KW: Y'know, the industry's changin', the buildin' industry because there's nobody out there, y'know, 'avin' work done really.

SN: No.

KW: Richardtown is quite lucky...they must be spending, the estates, probably anywhere upwards for £4million this year in Richardtown.

SN: Really.

KL: Gosh.

KW: On building work. You won't get that very many places in the country.

SN: No...

KW: One job's £3.5million they're doin'.

SN: Where's that?

KW: The Dog and Duck Hotel

SN: Is it?

KW: Yeah, it's £3.5million. As it stands now. It could easily go up to another half million if they find problems.

SN: It was horrible. Errr...

KW: I don't know...is that in Richardtown?

SN: Yeah, it's the building is site we drove past on the way in. It's got loads of scaffolding and is covered in tarpaulin.

KW: And we're working straight opposite that.

SN: Are you?

KW: Yeah, the stables. We're doin' the stables which was their coaching stables.

SN: Right OK

KW: Obviously we're not there...so we'll end up gettin' a bullin' tonight, cos there's nobody, nobody there on site today!

SN: Haha! I didn't know they'd started the stables yet actually.

KW: Pardon.

SN: I didn't know they'd started the stables...

KW: Well all we're doin' is makin' it look tidy, so when Sir Philip comes to open the Dog and Duck Hotel it looks tidy, you see. Poinin', an roofing works...

SN: Right, a bit like emergency works more than anything.

KW: It will be emergency works cos it's fallin' down.

SN: Yeah...

KW: It's what they call gone past its critical shape. It's moved so much it needs scaffold to 'old it up, to a point that I think it needs takin' down to rebuild.

SN: Really?

KW: As is, yeah. It's gone way past its critical shape.

SN: Right.

KW: But, y'know that's somebody else'll make that decision, not us. There's engineers involved.

SN: Right. So when you do take something down, like you've done with the wall, do you label things and put them back up again, or does it depend on the building?

KW: Depends on the building. And what we've done on this one is, err, we 'ave a tracin' frame outside, I don't know if you saw it, with a grid pattern, out there.

SN: Oh I see yeah

KW: And we photograph each section, and then we'll rebuild to that you see. That section...

SN: Uh huh

KW: We'll start and build, and then each one...

SN: Oh I see

KW: Then we'll just put the frame back in that position, and then rebuild as close as we can to that, with what stone's available...

SN: I've never ever seen that before...

KW: So we've got 50, 50 sections. 50 of 'em....there's one of them there look.

SN/KL: Oh yeah

KW: So this one section, it starts from this buttress 'ere...

SN: Uh huh...

KW: And so it's, when we put it back up, it's section 6 east, from this buttress that way. And then that gives us a figure, it's 9.2 to the side of the frame.

SN: Right

KW: And then the next one, like 7.9 and so on, so it's to each side of the frame. So just put the frame back up in that position...

SN: Uh huh

KW: And we try and find...if the stone's damaged, we try and find a stone to that size. Or, instead a tiles, terracotta tiles, we'll cut stone slips and put stone.

SN: Oh really?

KW: Of the same stone...

SN: Type...

KW: Yeah, so then there's no problem...

SN: They're just like stone tiles really.

KW: Yeah, which, if you look at a lot of medieval churches, it's there, they've done it like that. They've split the slates off and things like that... So there's no need to 'ave to put terracotta ones...

SN: No.

KW: As such. You can still do it with stone, can't you.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: Then all we'll do is, we'll just fasten that to a, to a piece of wood and it'll stand at the side of the, stand at the side of the section of wall when we rebuild in 2 metre sections as such.

SN: Right, OK.

KW: You see. All the information is... The back side, we couldn't do anything with the back side, cos it had a lot of sulphate attack on it, and a lot of it was gone.

SN: OK.

KW: So it will just get walled as a stone wall as such.

SN: So is this your technique?

KW: Yes.

SN: Right OK.

KW: It's something they do at West Dean, very, very similar, but we related it back to this, y'know it was my idea to relate it back to this.

SN: OK. I've never seen it before, cos it makes it...Like it still conserves the appearance doesn't it?

KW: Yes.

SN: And it's not quite so labour intensive and time consuming as labelling each stone.

KW: Yeah, I...on small sections, we've done it on small sections, but what, this is 50 metres long...

SN: Yeah, it's ridiculous...

KW: ...you know, you'll end up with too much work for the actual value of what the wall is.

SN: Mmm.

KW: The council are happy to...cos t's been rebuilt once before, and down the bottom end, where it was rebuilt, where it had deflected, that had bee rebuilt err 4 or 5 years ago by a local, well Constructa they call 'em, they're actually a civil engineering...i.e...

SN Roads?

KW: They do lots of drainage work and roads. And they rebuilt it all in sand and cement.

SN: Right.

KW: So it had been rebuilt in sand and cement and deflected again after sand and cement ya see. Whereas if it 'ad been a lime, it woulda moved, but had the chance to move back as such.

SN: Mmm

KW: And then each one...I've got them all...to where each one is...I've put a dating peg on one of the trees. I don't know if you saw, there's a peg with a piece a wood 'round it, right near our sample panel.

SN: I don't think so, no.

KW: An it's a datum and everything. And we've got the amounts, the measurements from that datum to each side of each one. So we've took a level all the way down, so we know the level, so...if we wanna say where is that stone, we can cross reference it either way, and we can datum it from that point to, you know 450 up.

SN: Right.

KW: So, if we want we can, each stone can actually be to within 10, 15 mm, can be replaced where it came out from as long as that stone is still usable.

SN: Yeah.

KL: Mmm.

KW: Cos they're fallin' to pieces your see. Erm, we reckon that between 30 and 50% of that stone is damaged. So how do you really do...it's so accurate, you're only puttin' 50% at the most of the original wall back in anyway aren't ya?

SN: Mmmm.

KW: So you're losin' an amount of time by tryin' to number 50% of stone that's gonna be damaged anyway.

SN: Yeah.

KW: It just falls to pieces in ya 'ands. But we did...we 'ave actually found further down on that wall, got, lower down, actually stone ax...not stone axis, but, the stone that was axed rather than chiseled. There's actual axe marks.

SN: Really?

KW: The French type, lime stone axes and so on.

SN: Right.

KW: Which we 'ave to try and preserve somewhere else on the wall so people can see...and then we've gotta put a little shadow of where the culvert is, so the culvert's actually visible from up above. When the wall's rebuilt.

SN: Right OK.

KW: So it shadows it sorta thing, y'know.

SN: So you are making changes.

KW: Yes, we are, but again, we've recorded, sorta 10 metres of the lower section was rebuilt by Constructa 4 or 5 years ago.

SN: Oh yeah, not...making, y'know, positive changes.

KW: Yes. Well instead of it falling down, it's going to be...y'know it'll stand up again.

SN: And be understood as well...

KW: Thats right, can be read as such, yeah.

SN: You won't have to be dug again.

KW: Which is where I think my philosophy slightly alters to a lot of people, I believe if something's unique, rare, or unique to that position, then it should be preserved in situ. But when you're talkin' of a building, that if you don't do something with it, even if it 'as to change slightly, it'll be come a ruin. People 'ave got to 'ave some interest in it. So, I think if you change the building slightly, but it becomes usable that building, it's gonna preserve its lifespan isn't it.

SN: Mmm.

KW: If you just preserve somein like-for-like and it's still a ruin and can't be used, or it's open to the weather, the elements, and it's gonna fall down in another 10 or 15 years, I think ya wastin' ya time.

SN: Mmmm

KW: Ya might as well let it fall down again 'adn't ya? Unless it's really, really important, it's William the Conqueror sat there or somethin' like that... But I think, y'know buildin' wise, I think why the estates've sort of asked us to do a lot of work in that, they realise there's a lot of historical content in Richardtown, but it's got to be usable. It's gotta get human interest.

SN: Yeah.

KW: Someone's gotta, like Dog and Duck yard, their spendin' £100,000 just doin' the outside shell up and so on like. And there's a lime ash floor which we'll preserve, and so on. But nobody's gonna buy that if you're preservin' rotted timbers for the sake of preservin' rotted timber. Nobody wants to put a shop in there if you've got rotton timbers in there do they?

SN: No.

KW: Yeah, so that, I think that's why they're askin' us to try and re-use the buildin's.

SN: Right OK, that's interesting. Erm, you talked a little bit about materials down there. But, can you go through again like erm, how you source the stone for the wall, and what sort of stone you got and where it came from?

KW: It's...the actual...the main wall as such is built of calcareous grit, which we can't get hold of anymore. Erm, they're tryin' to open the quarries at Browse, which still 'asn't come to fruition yet. Nobody's doin' anything about it. Alan, y'know I think 'e did really well tryin' to get it re-opened, but I think since Alan is not on the scene as much, it's not gonna be re-opened in the near future. So the next best thing is, the nearest stone in Richardtown, is Richardtown Oolite. So we've sourced that through stone merchants, who've said they've took this one from ahh barn *muffled*. We've been to see the buildin', knocked it down, and we've literally bought the buildin', which is 3 miles away, which is still in the lime stone int it, lime stone belt, and we've brought that over. The stone's an original stone, it's not, it's...stone nowadays in quarries is blasted out, so you get micro-fracturing in it, which the new stone that we saw, y'know the wrong stone. That will be micro-fractured. Right, no matter what people say, they blast 'em out because it's economies of scale. You can't pull them out, y'know bar 'em of the walls now, like they used to do. So we've got the best we can with large tails into the wall. It's 3 miles, it's as local as you can get.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: And it's good stone, it's been weathered. It's stood itself for 150, 200 years already. Err, there's not gonna be this first 2 or 3 years of seasoning where as it could, it could end up frosting up, because it's now used to the, to the...

SN: The weather...

KW: ...the elements as such. So I think that's the best we can basically do, instead of bringing new sandstone in as such.

SN: So is that what you normally try and do, use reclaimed?

KW: We do yes, where we can.

SN: Right, OK.

KW: Unless it's...obviously depends on the building. If it's ashlar work you've got to, an you can source that quarry...

SN: Uh huh...

KW: You can go and get the new ashlar work, and then we try and dull the edges a little bit, and just dependant on the building.

SN: Right OK.

KW: Down to sometimes we might just power wash them. Just to take the surface off, and it just lets the moss grow quicker on them.

SN: Right.

KW: Only on silica stones, we don't do that on limestones.

SN: OK. And then, what about lime? Where do you get your lime from?

KW: Mmm...we buy most of our lime...we buy a lime putty through Ryedale Conservation at Terrington.

SN: Right

KW: Erm, but then again 'e's changin'...cos 'e's baggin' 'is lime rather than err tubbin' it, so we find that's, it's getting' no good to us as such. If we want it we tend to take some of our own tubs. Because 'e puts them in vacuum sealed bags an the idea of a lime putty is you let it settle so the water comes to the top.

SN: Uh huh

KW: Pour the water off, then you can use the lime as you want, to what consistency. He puts them in bags, an even if they're stood for 3 months, as soon as you pick the bag up it shakes it all about again, so you end up with just a liquid again you see.

SN: Right OK.

KW: But that's 'is economies of scale, 'e finds it's cheaper to, to sell them in bags than supply in a plastic tub.

SN: Right.

KW: And the lime we tend to buy from David Cartwright's.

SN: Right.

KW: We get it from 'im. We might go through in a season 8, 9 tonne of bag lime, hydraulic lime. We use quite a lot of lime as such. We are about to maybe try and do our own lime burn, up at our yard.

SN: Oh really?

KW: Make our own pit maybe, and run of it ourselves. But again, it's got to be done in summer, but if we're busy in summer we'll end up not doin' it.

SN: Mmm.

KW: Cos we're, y'know, my yard's where my father-in-law is. Err, we 'ave a big workshop which is part of masonry, and then there's all the lime stuff and so on like. Erm...that's about it really.

SN: What about sand?

KW: Sand we actually use a local sand, which is Yeadingham sand, the sharp sand.

SN: Uh huh

KW: Which is again 4 or 5 miles that way. Which I don't think you can get any better than that. There's no where else in this area. And it's suitable, it's a good mix, and we use the bright yellow sand, which is Sherbourne sand. We don't use...there is another soft sand around 'ere but we don't use, cos it 'as lots a white checkers in, such as that.

SN: Oh OK.

KW: And we tend to stay with the sand that we know works.

SN: Right. So, materials are quite important to you?

KW: They are yes, yeah.

SN: You try to pick things that match the building that you're working on...

KW: As in stone, or... What do you mean?

SN: I know stone obviously, but with like the sand, do you think it's important to use a local sand or do you...

KW: Yes I do yeah. An, most of our mortars 'ave limestone dust in anyway, which again we either get from Whitewall quarry, or we get from Pickering quarry.

SN: Uh huh. Right.

KW: Yeah, so we try and use as much...it's only really the yellow building sand that we can't source...it's, the buildin' sand, which we call soft sand, is more orangey colour.

SN: Right

KW: Which is...I don't know if you noticed down there, there's 4 sample panels, just small areas of pointin'.

SN: I didn't notice.

KW: And you'll notice, when we use the two local, when we use the soft sand and the sharp sand, it comes quite a red colour.

SN: Oh OK.

KW: So then, y'know, we done 4 as in limestone dust, and there's our control for the sand that's workin' 'ere, the mortar mix wrote there...and...it's wrote there. That 'as to stay on site so everybody that comes on site knows the...

SN: ...knows the mix.

KW: ...knows the mix yeah. There's no excuse. It's there, it's wrote up on the wall as well for them, so there's a bit of a control isn't it for them.

SN: Yeah, a big control. It's like a rule, or a recipe.

KW: It is yeah. There's no excuse then is there?

SN: No.

KW: An each day we 'ave a little site diary an...we 'ave to write down temperatures and so on, like so, even if the council don't want it, it's my control on site.

SN: What, because then you know how...

KW: If the mortar's failed cos it was too cold...

SN: ...the temperature...

KW: ...y'know...

SN: And what's your approach to after care?

KW: As much as we can really.

SN: You go back,,,

KW: We do go back yeah, and cover over. We tend to use carpets. A lot of people...

SN: I know, I saw the carpet on the way in!

KW: ...the car...we do 'ave bubble wrap as well on site, but...an 'essian's only really any good for summer workin'.

Where you can wet it down and keep the moisture in the wall. In the winter it's just no good, it's just...it's pointless 'avin' 'essian. So what we tend to do is put carpets over, and then bubble wrap over. And the carpet's actually weight themselves down

SN: Uh huh

KW: Turn them the other way up so they can turn the water, but the shag pile as such is trappin' air in as well.

SN: Right

KW: ...which is insulating it as well.

SN: Right OK.

KW: And we, y'know, we find it works

SN: So in the winter it's more about keeping it warm?

KW: Keepin' the temperature above 5 degrees if possible.

SN: And, but in the summer it's about keeping it wet.

KW: It is, yeah.

SN: Right OK. I've never really though that about winter...cos a lot of people say not to work in the winter don't they?

KW: They do. Well today's sort of on the borderline. When we came this morning it was 0 degrees...

SN: OK. It's quite an exposed site as well isn't it?

KW: It is, yeah. Another hour or so and they'll stop workin' and we'll cover over. But because we're on the site all the time, we're keepin' an eye on the weather conditions. If t starts that it doesn't get above 0 degrees by 9 o'clock, we won't, we'll just stop workin' altogether. We'll start...hack out, or dress stone, that type a...or go to another job basically.

SN: Mmmm

KW: But because it's quite a long job, we can control, because we're 'ere most days...I think it's more important if ya just doin' a small patch of mortar somewhere and then you're not gonna come back for another 2 or 3 weeks, there's nobody there to tend it. We're 'ere most days ya see, so...

SN: Mmm.

KL: So that's why you have your thermometer hanging there?

KW: That's right, yeah. We check that when we first get 'ere on a morning. We know at half 7 when we get here on a morning it'll be 0 degrees, we know it's... But then, by the time we get set up, we 'ad to go for some sands today, it was quarter past 9 before we started mixing, so the temperatures...

KL: Mmm

KW: ...come up enough. And we're keeping that heat in by using the carpets, we're keeping that thermal heat in as such

SN: Yeah.

KW: And the mortar itself, you know the exothermic reaction, it starts to create it's own heat within side. The chemical reaction as such, yeah.

SN: Mmmm.

KW: Although it's only slight, because it's only small amount a mortar. But me dad, again, goin' back to me dad, me dad 'e's died 15,16 years ago now. Like I say, 'e was in the buildin' trade all 'is life...

SN: Mmm.

KW: ...'e was apprenticed before the war, and then when the war came along 'e ended up in, in Burma, and then when 'e came back, 'e saw the big change in cement,. Even though cement was comin' in 50 years before that, there

was a real big change of it. And then when I started, 'e started telling me things when I started my apprenticeship back in the '80s, 'oh why don't you put a bit a lime in it', and so on like that... An so 'e inadvertently told me a lot of things that I'm remembering now.

SN: Oh, OK.

KW: Even though 'e's been dead 15 years. We're comin' across those sort a situations now, what my dad was talkin' about because it's took me 15 years to get into what my dad was maybe doin' back in the...

KL: Yeah

KW: ...the late 30s as such, y'know.

SN: Yeah

KW: And err like, 'e told me, typical was they put salt, they used to put salt in the lime mortars, not salt, sorry, sugar.

SN: Mmm hmm.

KW: ...same as putting, ya put salt on the road don't ya, to lower the freezin' temperature. They used to use sugar because sugar didn't, erm, the problems with putting salt in, obviously it creates a salt crystal, which is very strong as such. A sugar crystal does the same thing, but it's a lot more err workable. It, it, eradicates itself in the wall, or whatever the best word is. Melts itself much more quicker. Which is why in Wales, a lot a people in Wales erm they found last year, that the salt last year wasn't workin' on the rural roads, an what it was, it wasn't salt, it was molasses, they were puttin' grit stone, and the sheep were actually licking the molasses off the road.

KL: Oh right!

KW: So they found out that sugar does the same as salt, but is not as harmful as such. But me dad was tellin' me this 20 years ago.

SN: Right, right.

KW: We actually went down to West Dean and approved it at West Dean that sugar will do the same as salt but not as 'armful as such.

SN: Right.

KW: So me dad was tellin' me things 20 years ago that are just comin' into, into play now, as such. Which again I think's a good thing, cos the old apprenticeships, it was passed on from father to son as such...

SN: Yeah.

KW: So I'm...my dad, as I say was a builder, my nephew's a builder, I'm a builder, and we 've at least 2 generations that were quarry workers when Pickering produced actual masonry stone, not just road stone as such.

SN: Uh huh

KW: So again, the granddad's told me dad things, and they were passed onto us.

SN: Right, OK.

KW: You know, we used to 'ave hammers that when I was an apprentice bricklayer, even though we were doin' stonework, some of these old boys 'ad never seen these type of 'ammers. Because it'd gone, y'know, people weren't usin' it. But my granddad's 'ammers from 1900 or whatever, that type a thing.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: So, y'know, I think we're quite privileged that we 'ave that sort of descendance, that I've 'ad that knowledge...some would say it's no...it's only a builder, but I'm proud of the ancestry as such.

KL: Mmm.

SN: Definitely

KW: Just a shame 'e wasn't still 'ere to've, y'know, carried on with more gems, little gems that we've got, y'know.

KL: Seen where you've got to...

SN: So when you're working with like conservation officers and stuff, do they ask about these sort of practices? Y'know about taking temperature on the site and things?

KW: Erm, not so much conservation officer. I think over the last 15 years, excuse me, I think the conservation officer's roles 'ave changed as well. Erm, when I first started it was a chap called Donald Smith. Before that it was a Mrs Cliff, she was a lady, and I've seen her house pointed 15, 16 years ago and she 'ad her house repointed with sand and cement. So I think the conservation officers have caught up with the lime as well, to a point where I've either been on the same courses, or they've actually been on the courses that I was 'elpin' teach down at West Dean. So I think we're buildin' up a respect with conservation officers to such a point they generally don't ask, they just assume that we're gonna do it.

SN: Yeah.

KW: Cos we've got that sorta parity as such, we're both singing out the same hymn book as such.

SN: Yeah, yeah.

KW: Erm, every now and again they might say something that, that erm, just to keep me on me toes y'know, "ave you too the temperature, 'ave you done this, 'ave you done that". G...and ya think, it's for their records isn't it?

SN: Uh huh.

KW: We generally do get on really well with conservation officers.

SN: Right OK.

KW: We get on well with (*muffled by drill*). But yeah, Jo and Bob at the local council, we tend to get on alright with those. It's Amy Rice now isn't it, she's ex-English 'Eritage. We tend to get on alright with...

SN: Yeah.

KW: ..with her.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: We used to get on with a chap called Peter Grainger. 'E was North Yorkshire Moors, 'e was from Northallerton, 'e was sort of , I wouldn't way above them but 'e 'ad a bigger jurisdiction.

SN: The County Council?

KW: Yes. And we got on really well with...'e actually sent quite a lot of work our way, to price.

SN: Oh really?

KW: And I think when you find that the conservation officers are recommending ya, I think you feel reasonably confident that they've got confidence in you as well.

SN: Yeah.

KW: To the point where, sometimes actually giving them advice on a job...they'll ring us up and say 'oh, what about this Ken?', and they use that advice as well.

SN: Mmmm. Do you find architects maybe play a key role?

KW: 'Aven't found many good architects.

KL: Haha.

SN: Right.

KW: Seriously, 'aven't.

SN: Right OK.

KW: There are 1 or 2 good ones, that I can name, but I still think, and I've thought it from a very early age as an apprentice, that architects don't do what they're supposed to do on site, or they don't do what the same as they used to do...

SN: Mmmm.

KW: Tend to push papers about now do architect, collate information off other people, and if there's err, a decision to be made they send in...to ask an engineer, or a specialist or so on like. And they don't like people such as meself sayin' "ang on a minute, why don't we do it this way?".

SN: Right.

KW: There is a little bit a snobbish, to do with architects I think.

SN: Right OK.

KW: And it shouldn't be, because it's team work isn't it?

SN: Should be, yeah.

KW: And no matter what an architect says to me, if I don't do it right at that end, on the wall, it can make 'im look silly as well, can't it?

SN: Uh huh.

KW: Cos we're the one doing in the work.

SN: Yeah.

KW: Erm, and it might be just the breed of architects that's comin' through, like the college where the college are trainin' 'em as well, but as I say y'know, when I was...I started on buildin' sites with me dad from 8 or 9 year old, and I know from 12 or 13 year old, an architect tended to know everything. 'E'd draw the plans, 'e'd done all the calculations, but now, 30 years on, they just don't, they 'ave to ask somebody else. 'I'll get back in touch with you about that'. So we as tradesmen tend to lose confidence.

SN: What about...are things like specifications less detailed than they used to be?

KW: Erm, I think they're too much generic specifications now. You can...after a time you end up readin' the same specification that somebody else 'as wrote, and they've ended up...or there must be a manual, general manual out there somewhere.

SN: Mmm.

KW: They don't tend to apply to specific sites. It's a general specification.

SN: Right.

KW: I've seen specifications now where there even using white cement..

SN: Right

KW: And they're supposed to be conservation architects. Or they're usin' stiff wire brushes to finish mortar pointin' off. Because they've read a book from 10 years ago and they think that that's still...

SN: ...relevant...

KW: ...relevant now. And it's not. So... I think the IHBC 'ave a big role to play in educating people. Saying look 'if you wanna be a conservation architect', which a lot a people are sayin' that, because there seems to be more work this last 2 years in the conservation field than in general 'ouse buildin'. Erm, I think they need more qualification or more experience.

SN: Uh huh

Phone rings

SN: Do you do a lot of err church work?

KW: We used to do 1 or 2 churches yeah, erm...but again that's Fred Price and so on, they tend to get that type of work. So we've moved into more this sort of field, y'know.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: If everybody's sensible there's enough work for everybody. Which is, y'know, I was dubious about coming to work for the estates because Alan did work 'ere. Professionally I didn't wanna move in on 'is territory, y'know. So, Fred does lots and lots a churches, so even though we've done churches in the past, we 'ave tendered for 1 or 2 churches an they...an basically not done them, y'know. But I think there shouldn't be a dog eat dog carry on, there's enough work for, for good quality companies in the area. And just leave people to their own specifica...specialty as such.

SN: OK.

KW: Alan, y'know, is very good at doing 'is talks an what have you. And I applaud 'im for that, so we never did any work in Richardtown. We were asked to do it. Fred is a very, very excellent banker mason, so 'e does the church work. It might change now because we've just got a York Minster trained stonemason on with us who can compete with Fred, so it might change now. I...well we'll see won't we, what happens in the future.

SN: Yeah, definitely.

KL: So when you say 'work like this', how would you categorise this?

KW: We do the awkward jobs...

KL: Right OK.

KW: ...y'know from the water mill that no-one else wanted to do, cos it's 4 foot under river bed level, to this, to one off jobs.

KL: So you like a challenge then don't you?

KW: We do, we do! Yeah, or I do anyway. Y'know, I like to think things out for a long time. The stable yard over there, the Dog and Duck, that, there's a gable there that's gonna fall. Erm, and I'll rack my brains for the next few weeks to come up with a way of doin' it, but I will hopefully eventually come up with it. So, 'ow do we put it? Fred's specialty is churches, cos 'e knows the style of carving doesn't 'e...

SN: Uh huh

KW: 'E knows which, on a church, 'e generally knows which stone it's gonna be, cos it's either local or it's a Victorian, 1800s, Georgian church. Y'know it's gonna've been brought in, generally sandstone. And Fred 'as got that knowledge now. And very good to 'im. We've got the knowledge of usin', y'know we can, a different skill set. We can do herringbone stone, y'know, the axis...

SN: Oh OK.

KW: You know, picks and saw like, we can do that type a work. Fred might think that's absolutely borin', but I still think it's, we're a bit more northern than them. We work in the Whitby area, the Glaisdale area, and so on. So, we stay in our, we stay in our leagues and that's good enough for us. If someone insists on doin' a church we will do, we can't turn work down.

KL: So what do you call your region then? You mentioned sort of Whitby, Glaisdale...

KW: Sort of Ryedale really. As far across as York, and then towards Scarborough really, and then up onto the Moors...

KL: Right.

KW: Although we 'ave done work in South *muffled*, y'know Hull and places like that.

KL: That's unusual is it?

KW: When we're doing work with the National Trust, a surveyor 'ad about 15, 16 properties to look after, So that was anywhere from Beningborough Hall, Treasurers House, up into the Dales. So quite an area with them. But that surveyor, obviously he's not there anymore, and that's...what do they call 'im now? Craig Barratt?

SN: Uh huh.

KW: Craig Barratt's there, but 'e's, they 'ave no budgets themselves like.

SN: No.

KW: So Craig's sorta token that role I think really.

SN: Right.

KW: Oh no, hey did take another job on...Dave Wright...I believe's taken the other job. An then 'e's left 'imself, so their all pickin' the pieces up as such. Which is obv, which is why I think the budget for each 'ouse is now responsible by the....

SN: They are, yeah. I think they've, grouped, they've grouped what was in the regional office into like consultancies, so if the house wants to do some survey work they'd choose a surveyor, and it might be the consultancy but it might not be.

KW: Right.

SN: I think that's how it's working. But no, they don't have their own budgets anymore, it's all with the houses. And they've got to make their own houses pay, so somewhere like Fountains Abbey is comfortable, but others...

KW: But English 'Eritage is going the same way as well. They're gonna change...

KL: Are they?

KW: Y'know, they're goin' more into the customer side of it than the actual work on the ruins.

SN: Right. Cos English Heritage got rid of their direct labour force quite a long time ago, didn't they?

KW: They did yes, yeah.

SN: Whereas National Trust 'ave not done so yet.

KW: Well they've gone the opposite way, National Trust've re-introduced their own labour forces 'aven't they?

SN: Mmmm.

KW: Which is at Scott's Gap isn't it, and Wallington, that way?

SN: I think they've got a few teams tha are around. Some are associated with properties and some aren't.

KW: That's....well, erm, Bransdale 'ave their own team..

SN: ...yeah, and I think there's one at Fountains too.

KW: Yeah, they 'ave one there. But at Bransdale there's only 2 lads I think. So it's not very big. But the main one is...I err don't know 'is surname...someone called Barry?

SN: Yes.

KW: 'E's in charge of the, training the teams I believe.

SN: Strange

KW: Stange, yeah. So, 'e's in charge of it. And I think that's what the other surveyor saw as well, that's there's gonna be more direct labour force movin' in. For a bit of a crossover time...for more than a year, when we were doin' any works on the National Trust, 'e ended up takin' loads and loads of photographs. And I think it turned out that once a month they all 'ad to do a talk on what work 'ad been done. And secretly they were collating our knowledge to give onto their own direct labour forces. We didn't know thiis until later...

SN: No.

KW: ...but that's what, that's what appears to 'ave 'appened. Cos where would they go for this knowledge without going to expensive courses?

SN: Mmmm.

KW: Typical one, we did some work over in erm, not Lothamthwaite, Malham Tarn, the estate up there. And Clifton Construction 'ad lime washed the farm house. And they'd used lime putty. You can't use a lime putty on a farm house in the middle of the Yorkshire Dales. It's a stones throw away from the wettest place in the country, the Lake District.

And so it just didn't cure, the mortar started fallin' out, it'ad damp patches allover it. They said 'Ken you come up and tell us what's wrong with it?'. So I went up, and said it's lime putty, you can't use that, use hydraulic lime wash.

They've got another farm buildin' just 100 yards up the road, said 'can ya lime wash that?'. So they gave us this job, which was a week's work, we put one lime wash on a day, one coat a day on. An bein' hydraulic it was goin' off enough each day, but everyday different people from the National Trust came and watched us doin' it.

SN: Hah!

KW: When we went back about 6 months later, the work on Lothamthwaite, which we drove past to get to Malham Tarn, was all bein' lime washed by their own people. So they're usin' our knowledge to train their own teams as such.

SN: Mmm.

KW: Spose that's how you do it, int it? Beningborough Hall we did 12 really massive chimney stacks, erm, with Lithomex repair mortars, lime mortar repairs, *muffled*, stone indents, erm, down to we were tapin' the joints, real fine ashlar work. We did all that for them. Low and behold, when they started the stable block, it was the same techniques that we'd used, on the...on the stable...on these...on the chimney stacks, they'd used the exact techniques to do the work over, on a larger scale. It was Bullen's that did that. They'd actually used our knowledge and transferred it across...if they's a said 'do you wanna come as a consultant?', I'd a gone as a consultant!

SN: Hahaha, yeah.

KW: Is this what you wanted, or?

KL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So do you tend to get invited to tender a lot then?

KW: We do yes, yeah.

KL: ...rather than you going out and looking for work?

KW: We, tend to get invited, yes. We do get invited. Quite a lot of invites. As such and through word of mouth, or...sometimes we might actually, we might 'ave a bit of a phase where we maybe 'aven't got any work, so we tend to either meet a few architects, or we send information out to them, just to keep them knowin' that we're in the area. Erm, some architects, obviously 'ave their own favourites anyway, that always get on the tender list, but another way of doin' it, if we wanted to work on listed buildings, which might just be somebody's house, we look in the local paper, look for the planning applications, look for the listed buildings and get information that way. Cos then we target 'em, direct...

SN: Oh, that's a really good idea.

KW: ...customer aren't we? And we might get a feedback of, over the years, 60% might ask us to price, but if we 'ave pamphlets already printed, the price is a stamp and an envelope, it's worth it isn't it?

SN: Yeah, definitely.

KL: So, that's just something you've thought of yourself is it, that idea?

KW: Yes, yes.

KL: Right.

SN: It's a really good idea.

KW: Specifically hittin' that market we want to hit as such.

SN: Yeah, absolutely.

KW: We do 'ave adverts in the local papers, cos, as me wife said, you might find that somebody'll read the pamphlet and say 'this is fantastic', but then throw it down or put it in a drawer somewhere, then in 6 weeks time they might think 'great, I want such and such a work', but if you're name's in a local free paper, you're there again. It's a reminder again int it, so they might well get the pamphlet out and say 'yeah, this is exactly what we want'. But we do 'ave quite a good...as I say conservation officers recommend us for work...

KL: Are you talking about the people...working for the council?

KW: Yes, yeah, yeah. They don't recommend your work...they just say...what they tend to do is, they'll 'ave a short list of say 6 or 8 builders that they...and they'll say 'these are the builders that we would like to see tenderin' for it'. So that...

KL: Mmmm

KW: That's good for us I spose.

KL: And that would be, would that be work on public and private buildings? That they would be asking you to...

KW: Erm...I don't know 'ow you would qualify that...erm we do it for both, but what they would call public works are probably what they...it could be a private house but what they've grant aided, won't it?

KL: Yeah, yeah.

KW: That'll be where that sorta comes in, so for both sections, either the totally the independent public, and the grant aided work. But, we've gone in circles, in the last 3 or 4 years we used to do a lot with National Parks. National Parks 'ave 'ad their budget cut a lot, used to do a lot with the National Trust, they've 'ad their budgets cut, we did a lot with nat...with English 'Eritage. They've 'ad their budgets cut. So luckily now we're, wi Peverill Diocese...

KL: Yeah

KW: Mexborough Estates, the Earl a Mexborough, and we're just tryin', if we can, to get in with Birdsall Estates. Which they're private sector aren't they?

SN: Yeah they are private sector.

KW: Public sector's gone as such. Like we're doin' this one...this could literally be a one off. There might not be any other work.

SN: Yeah.

KL: And with the estates, is that mostly then funded by the estates?

KW: Yes.

KL: Or do they get grants from...

KW: Erm...

KL: Bit of a mixture maybe?

KW: Yeah, the Mexborough Estates, when we did Harker Gates for them, which was on the buildings at risk register, that was an absolute ruin – there was a tree growin' through the front door of that one. Err, they actually got some, we got on that because the National Parks put our name forward because they were fund...grant aiding that.

KL: Right

KW: But they only grant aided about 10 or 12 thousand pound a the work, it was actually £100,000 plus. So that's how we got in with that estate. Through the national park. Or else they wouldn't 'ave 'eard of us as such.

KL: Yeah.

SN: When it comes to like assets that the local authority's own, do you ever find yourself working on those? Like, you know, there's lots of scheduled bridges in North Yorkshire...

KW: Erm, we've 'ad the chance to, just the workload, 'ow much we can do in a year. Last year we were either in the enviable, or the unenviable, which way you see...we turned over around 300, 350,000 a year, and we threw back as much work as what we actually did in the year.

SN: Really.

KW: So we could've expanded 100% if we wanted, but we can't for the cash flow. Y'know, we know now that there are people out there, but when you get every Friday, every Sunday when the wife does the payment of 8 and a half, 9 thousand pound goin' out in wages, and then all of a sudden that could be twice that...

SN: Mmmm

KW: ...and a year ago there was maybe only 3, 4 of us.

SN: Yeah.

KW: It's a really big step up for the firm...

SN: Yeah, I'm surprised that there's 12 of you now...

KW: Yeah well 11 of us.

SN: 11, sorry.

KW: We find it hard to bridge that gap, y'know, before we've funded everythin'...

SN: Uh huh

KW: Whereas we're now, I wouldn't say we're reliant...one minute we'll could 'ave *muffled* money or bank, don't get paid for 6 weeks and all of a sudden we're into...'avin' to use the overdraft.

SN: Uh huh

KL: Yeah.

KW: If we're twice as big, we're talkin' a lot of money on overdraft, and we just, we just want to do that yet. That's why we threw back as much work. Why that linked in with the bridge last year, we were asked to do Rosedale Bridge at the bottom a Chimney Bank in Rosedale, and there was 5 companies that asked us to do the stonemasonry company, the err management company, and we were asked by all 5 tenders to do the masonry. So if I wanted that job, I was gonna get it, cos there was no other stonemasons...

KL: ...yeah...

KW: ...tenderin' for it. So that was quite a unique position...

SN: Uh huh

KW: But we do find, when we did, we're doin' Beaconsfield Castle at the moment...

SN: Oh are you?

KW: Not the stonemasonry, we're just doin' the soft cappin'.

SN: Right, OK.

KW: We were the only company asked, there was 17 companies asked us for the price of the soft cappings.

KL: Really?

SN: Are you becoming known as like as specialist in that then?

KW: It's just because when we did it with Oxford University, we did the initial 6, 7 years ago...

SN: Mmm.

KW: They actually used our, y'know when they did the Stone Federation talks, we were actually in the talks...

SN: Right. OK.

KW: Y'know, so they say 'who did it?'. Firm07GB did the masonry. So they just looked us up. Y'know, people, on the castle side, and so on, who were from English Heritage. Mavis Bee's, they recommend us...

SN: Right.

KW: ...as such. So we don't...probably...we're goin' on Thursday to finish the last bit of cappin's...

SN: Right OK.

KW: ...off on that one. We'd've like to to 'ave done the masonry, but we couldn't...when there's 17 companies askin' us for turf toppin', it's a bit of a conflict...or do we do the turf toppin' and do the masonry? Some would way 'it's a bit of a fiddle 'ere...', cos we could give a turf toppin' price at £30,000, and it should only be £3,000 worth a work. So we got the masonry, so we 'ad to pull back off that one.

SN: Right.

KW: Else I woulda liked to 'ave done that. That was quite a good job to 'ave done *muffled*. But we are y'know, quite enviable, unique in that way. We get some, some good work, because of our stature I suppose.

SN: And how do you...

KL: Err....

SN: Sorry

KL: No, go on.

SN: And how do you decide to pick contracts? IS it about the type of work?

KW: I never pick 'em right, that's why people are always chasin' me!!!

SN: Pardon?

KW: I never pick the right contracts...

SN: Right

KW: Because people are always chasin' me. The worst thing we 'ave is gettin'...men...the other day we were at the Dog and Duck and that was only sposed to be a £23,000 job..

SN: Mmm.

KW: And it's now over £100,000 job. Because it's just...they've asked us for more...they're happy with the first work we did, and it's, it's quadrupled. So...

SN: Mmm

KW: So, I'm not in the *muffled* because I've got to 'ave enough work to keep people goin', so how do I fit another £70,000 worth of work in when I've already...when everybody else is allocated everywhere else.

KL: Mmmm.

KW: So I...we never pick the....we never seem to pick the easy option.

SN: No

KW: We're always chasin' our tail, we're always need more people. We always need more money to invest to keep the jobs goin'.

KL: Mmmm

KW: The other day we were all....well not all of us, cos there's a gang elsewhere. There was 9 of us on site, and it was fantastic, I could stand back and work was being done.

SN: Mmm

KW: But then the followin' day, 3 of 'em ad to go somewhere else, and 2 somewhere else, an...an that's, I get really stressed because I've split the gangs up everywhere. And that to me is one of the...project management is one of the biggest headaches y'know as such.

SN: Really?

KW: Yeah, I just can't seem to do it right. Cos I'm a craftsman, a tradesman, rather than a manager.

SN: Uh huh

KW: So it would be nice if there was actual training courses for heritage contracts managers. I'd go on one a those!

SN: Ah haha

KW: Specific to cons...to heritage work.

KL: Heritage. Right.

SN: Yeah.

KL: So do you think it needs to be specific to heritage work then? A course like that?

KW: I do yeah. In an ideal world, erm, I may stand on some peoples toes 'ere, but I think there's too many management companies 'ave come into the heritage work. Y'know, that used to do estates, factories, shops and so on like. The company's that got Beaconsfield Castle, doin' the main work, is Killby and Gayford, which had over 100 people that were just managers, they've no builders of their own, and so they've got contractors in. But they'll be takin' 40% off for the management side a that. In my opinion, the ruin suffers. Because they cut the costs...their not gonna cut their own costs, their gonna cut the masonry costs aren't they?

KL: Who, whose funding the Beaconsfield Castle...?

KW: Wakefield Council.

KL: It is the Council.

KW: Yeah.

KL: Because, erm, the stuff I've been hearing lately is that a lot of the public work is going that way...that is is going via the third party. Whatever you want to call it.

KW: Yeah. Management company.

KL: And erm a lot of people are saying exactly the same as you. It's immediately adding 40% to the cost.

KW: That's right, yeah.

KL: Erm, and err, y'know, I don't quite understand the logic of why it's going in that direction.

KW: I think it's so the Council can, erm, I wouldn't say wash their hands of it, but they're confident that the Council aren't gonna get bit in the back side. There's not gonna be something....cos the management company will look after all the health and safety...

KL: They're passing the risk on aren't they...

KW: They're just now payin' a cheque aren't they....

KL: Mmmm

KW: But then the ruin's or the...it's not getting' the correct people...

KL: Yeah.

KW: ...because Killby and Gayford are then goin' out to the cheapest company they possibly can, to do the work, not... They've used Fernivals, which is fair enough, luckily they've got a decent company on it. But, it coulda gone out to anybody that said 'I can do 'eritage work'. There's nobody out there....

KL: But, but would the local authority draw up the initial specification though that requires the kind of skill and detail that you're worried about?

KW: Yes. They got, erm, err from Manchester...Pritchard is it? Evans and Pritchard, somethin' like that?

SN: An architect?

KW: Yeah. Architects in, yeah

SN: Possibly, I don't know.

KW: They come to do the initial work on it, which is drawings, you know drawings, elevations and that.... And then, I was called over to look....there was a big sheeted area, they asked me to go look at turf toppin's and the walls, and she 'adn't drawn the plans yet, so I spent 3 hours...she's gone now, Bev Armitage, and architect, tellin' 'er to do the core work, and 'ow to do the arches, so... Inadver...free of charge, I 'eld 'er to the specifications for the masons to come in. I didn't get paid a penny for it.

KL: Somebody else has made comments similar to that, about almost, yeah, getting' kind of free...

KW: Free advice, yes, yeah, yeah. Erm, which, luckily we got it back cos we got the turf toppn's we were able to do that, but... So, the management companies are the wrong people for it. The person that's over, that's managin' the

site, the contracts manager on site, is an ex-shop fitter. 'E said it 'imself, 'e said 'I've never, ever worked on a heritage site in my life. But I'm in charge of the ruin'.

SN: Mmm.

KW: That's gotta be wrong 'asn't it?

KL: Mmm.

KW: An ex-joiner, shop fitter, workin' on a castle ruin. That can't be, just can't be right. 'E's got no control 'as 'e? 'E's got no heritage...doesn't know what we're doin' with the lime mortars, 'e just 'as no knowledge of it. But that's cos the management company's come in and put that chap in charge of it.

KL: Mmm.

KW: Luckily the masons might've been able to pull it back because...

SN: They are skilled?

KW: But that's their, y'know, use their skills.

SN: But it shouldn't be...it shouldn't lie with them really.

KW: It shouldn't, no, no.

SN: Erm, do you think a monument like that castle would suffer more than a different sort of listed building, like the one that comes to my mind is West Offices in York?

KW: What do you mean suffer? For usin' management?

SN: Yeah. Are they more sensitive, I think is what I'm tryin' to say.

KW: The castle?

SN: Yeah.

KW: Yes, I think they. Because, such as Wakefield, Beaconsfield Castle, there's no admission fee, everybody can walk in or out. So, if they made a bad job a that, there'd be lots and lots a people lookin' at that.

SN: Mmm.

KW: And say it's a good or a bad job as such.

SN: And it's also rarer, like a castle is rarer than...

KW: It is, yeah. Which is, the castle, most a the castles 'ave been rebuilt with, the top metre anyway, with sand and cement.

SN: Uh huh.

KW: English Heritage, or former historic monuments did it as a matter of course.

SN: Yeah.

KW: So they are vulnerable, which is why they developed the soft capping, err toppin' regime.

SN: Right.

KW: To try and stop all this.

SN: Right OK.

KW: Erm, and so a person's opinion of what a castle should look, is not what it would've originally looked like if it was a ruin. Because it's all been rebuilt.

SN: Mmm.

KW: So I think there's a bit foggin' the issue there as well.

SN: Right.

KW: Erm, but. I think the castle's are more important in my opinion than churches. Cos the castle maybe is not gonna get looked after as much as, maybe a well attended church. Y'know, people at church don't want the roof *muffled* off, do they?

SN: No.

KW: They don't want a piece a stone about to fall off, but on a castle they put up with that. Because maybe no-one's directly involved with the maintenance of it. It's to look like a ruin isn't it, a castle. So it can maybe go for a generation before any work's really....

SN: IT goes back to what you said before about use, doesn't it really?

KW: That's right, yeah.

SN: Like there's people actually in a church sometimes, and in a listed building, like a hotel...

KW: That's right...

SN: ...and so if that's leaking water, and being damaged, then people notice.

KW: That's right.

SN: Whereas if it's a castle ruin, then it just is exposed to the elements.

KW: Yeah. When we worked at Barnard Abbey, doin' the turf toppin's, we 'ad to go about...we 'ad a 5 year, each year we 'ad to go back and check them. So *muffled* and take photographs. With English 'Eritage...they did most the work. But it was a continual assessment of it. And, for 2 seasons we 'ad to go back and pick all the stone up that 'ad fallen on the site, and I think we picked up in 2 seasons, 1 and a half tonne of stone.

SN: Really?

KW: That 'ad fallen off Barnard Abbey. So if that's 'appenin' every year, and nobody's really takin' notice of that, the, the ruins will fall to pieces won't they? They'll literally, at the end of another couple a generations they'll be gone.

SN: And that's what'll happen...

KW:that's what'll 'appen

SN: ...when this contract has finished at Beaconsfield Castle.

KW: Yeah.

SN: Cos the management company'll just come in and go again.

KW: That's right, yeah.

SN: So you kind of lose that longevity don't you, by not using the actual council...?

KW: You lose that continuation, yeah.

SN: Yeah.

KW: The direct labour force at English Heritage were good, but they found that was nothing for them to do in winter. And so because of the money situation English 'Eritage couldn't keep people on doing nothing in winter. So they use contractors now, so that we 'ave to find the work for people in winter as such.

SN: Yeah.

KW: So English 'Eritage 'ave lost that skill base, which is what...why West Dean were set up, to try and keep that skill base of working on castle ruins. When you talk about, when I was on site with the architect, engineer and so on like, we got on about West Dean, one engin...one a the architects 'ad actually said 'I know your face'. You actually taught me to do lime pointing down at West Dean'. So straightaway I 'ad a link with that chap, straightaway, that the other people just didn't 'ave a clue what we were talkin' about. Because they were used to shop fittin', or buildin' a school, or something like that. Well that shouldn't be the case. It shouldn't be just one person on site...it should, all the team should 'ave some input in that, shouldn't they?

SN: Yeah.

KW: You should be able to bounce things back off each other...if the architect knows nothing about lime work, 'e's gonna, 'e's gonna 'ave the final say... No matter what I say to try and convince 'im, 'e'll think I'm arrogant. And that's not the case...you're tryin' to say 'this should be lime mortar in 'ere', 'e's saying 'oh let's put a bit a white cement in' or... Shouldn't happen like. John Ashurst and Colin Burns wanted to set this thing...

(Interrupted by door knocking)

SN: I guess what we're trying to do is put our finger on what makes conservation and heritage so different.

KW: Well...Ian Constantinides, when I was on one of 'is specification courses come up with a formula. And 'e reckons in 'eritage project 'as 4.8 more possibilities of goin' wrong than a standard building. So it's nearly 5 times as much...

SN: Right.

KW: ...possibility of it goin' wrong. He sort of said that's because, scuse the phrase, the buggeration value. There's so many things that can go wrong.

SN: And is that cos of the unknowns...?

KW: The unknowns. Yeah, the unknowns. So if you get a management company that's used to...say Killby and Gayford, you can't just pick those out individually, if you get a management company that's just used to doing new build stuff, what's gonna suffer? It's not going to be their part is it? It's goin' to be the work on the ruin that's specified. Or they're gonna go back to the Wakefield Council and say 'look we want another £10,000 because we've underestimated'. But then it's not then...they'll say 'the masons 'ave underestimated, they can't quite get the mortar out quick enough' and so on like. It shouldn't 'appen like that.

SN: Mmmm.

KL: So can I just try and clarify this a bit more. So if it wasn't one of these management companies, what would be happening in its place? Who would be doing what they're doing, basically?

KW: Well what we're tryin'...West Dean...John Ashurst, rest 'is soul, 'e's gone now John, but what they were tryin' to do was set up a database as such of well trained masons that should do this work. Specifically....it was only really ex-

English 'Eritage stuff. Y'know castles and stuff like. Erm, and in this area there could be say 10 masons that can do it. And the architect should 'ave that database to say 'right, we're gonna use Stephen Pickering, Alan Clark, and Andy O'Boyle. And then those three should...what Colin, Colin Burns was the practical mason, would go 'round and say look 'you're gonna do lime pointing you're gonna do choppin' out, core work'. 'E would show you a metre of core work, 'ow it's done, with those 3 selected companies, to say that's 'ow English 'Eritage want it doin', we've got to base our specification on what we've seen done. Not on a list, on a quantities thing, y'know.

KL: So, would the council go to the architect and the architect would get the people...

KW: Should then manage it from there on...

KL: Right.

KW: Cos the architect's chosen 'is 3 contractors that 'e thinks are good enough for it. 'E will then 'ave....they will then either do a metre of their own core work on site, and the architect could say 'yes, that's what we want'. Or 'can you do that to our exemplar?'

KL: Uh huh

KW: And then 'e's got a standard, 'e's got a, you know, an example that it's got to come to all the time. There's no need to 'ave to 'ave a management company that's sayin' 'ang on a minute, you masons aren't doin' it right. I'm gettin' the ear off the council'. The masons themselves should just talk to the architect and the architect should sort it out shouldn't they? It's the link of the chain of supply gone int it?

KL: Mmm.

KW: You've got highly qualified masons and you've got a decent architect that should be able to do all the paperwork from then on. And that's what they were wantin' to do originally. But it's gone by the by. People don't wanna pay. You know, I don't know what, Colin'd be on £40 an hour, go 'round the country and do exemplar work on, on a ruin somewhere. It might cost 5 or 600 pound, but that's, that's not a big amount a money is it, compared to...

KL: Not of the overall, no.

KW: ...£100,000 that's being spent at Beaconsfield Castle.

KL: That's right.

KW: And then there's nobody *muffled* on site, the contracts manager whose coming out with this 40% of the management team, 'asn't a clue what's a good job or a bad job, because 'e's only ever worked shop fittin'. So 'e's the wrong person int 'e, to...

KL: Is there an architect, where does the architect...in this?

KW: They 'ave a monthly meeting.

KL: ...then, right.

KW: Well a lot a work can be done in a month can't it?

KL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KW: That's my opinion. That's what the change should be.

KL: Mmm. We've done work for Hunters Hall here in Richardtown, and they actually lived in Japan. And once a week we went 'round and took photographs, on a digital camera, of what we'd done. And e-mailed them across to 'em. And very little things went wrong on there. Because the, the customer was happy with what we were doin', confident that what we were gonna do was gonna be right... It was gonna be lime plasterin', was gonna be run covin', and all this, that and the other. And once a week we were sendin' 'im photographs over. So 'e wasn't payin' 40% for somebody to come and oversee us as such. And it worked well.

KL: Yeah.

SN: Yeah.

KL: Is there anything else you (to SN) want to pick up on?

SN: Yeah, yeah. Let me think, erm, so from what you're saying, do you prefer working as...to the main client?

KW: Yes.

SN: And not as a subcontractor?

KW: We don't like subcontracting full stop, no.

SN: Do you do it?

KW: Very, very rarely.

SN: Right, OK.

KW: Very rarely. Because the subcontract...we'll do a months work, excuse me, and then the subcontractor might stand on that bill for a month.

SN: Right.

KW: Before we get paid. And if 'e says 'oh no, we're goin' for another valuation in 2 weeks time', we could 'ave 6 weeks before we're paid.

SN: Uh huh

KW: and then if there's something wrong with our work, the sub, the management firm as such, the main contractor might take so much of our money, which all we needed was a bit of information. We could a righted it before we put the bill in.

KL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KW: So, if the main contractor's, as I say the main contractor over ways is, doesn't know 'ow to do core work, 'e doesn't know what's a good job or a bad job until the bill's gone it, and then the QS comes to survey it all to say that's good or bad, y'know. It's not fair, the control's not fair because it's the wrong people on the...that specify...that's dealin' with the paperwork. I don't wanna deal with the paperwork, I just wanna go and deal with the...

KL: Yeah.

KW: But I don't wanna get bogged down in somebody else's paperwork cos they don't know what they're doin'.

SN: No.

KW: I will deal with the paperwork, yeah, but... There's too much paperwork in public...

KL: Yeah

KW: ...works...

KL: well you mentioned the paperwork earlier on...

KW: It's too much, it's ridiculous.

KL: I was gonna ask you what all this paperwork is...so it's this kind of...?

KW: It's the 'ealth and safety, an it's site management, y'know. And, yes we all need toilet blocks an all like that, and that's, that's not an issue, but there seems to be reams and reams of e-mails backwards and forwards...I think I've 'ad, it summit like 30 something e-mails from Eddie Haynes, that's on the Beaconsfield Castle. Askin' what...when we're gonna come and do the turf work. We were down on the 26th of October to finish the turf cappins, and we finished 'em on Thursday. And, so, 'e's 6, 7 weeks out. Nothing to do with us, nothing to do with the masons. It's because they can't get the paperwork in in time for the next quantity surveyor's, you know site visit, and so on like. You don't need that amount a paperwork. The places were built without all that paperwork. But I spose it's public money, you need somebody to write the cheque don't ya, and so on like...

KL: Yeah, yeah.

SN: Yeah.

KL: But again it sounds like you're saying there's more paperwork, the way things are going...using these companies...

KW: Yes, yeah.

KL: ...and all the rest of it is adding to that.

KW: Yeah, yeah. The management companies are pickin' up a lot of the pub, or the council...they're pickin' up a lot of their paperwork...

KL: Right, yeah.

KW: ...that maybe they don't want to do, or can't do, cos of their cutbacks. But somebody's still payin' for it in the long run.

KL: Yes.

KW: Y'know, I 'ad a look at Beaconsfield Castle and I thought it was 'bout 60 to £65,000. It's come in at, the original costing's, which is half the work, or two thirds of the work. Was £98,000, came it at £98,000, this was Killby and Gayford's, for two thirds of the work, and it's gone over that now. It's probably about 115 now. And if I was doin' all the work, I would a done it for no more than 70,000. So the public sector 'ave lost £50,000 maybe. Their 40% cut, and stuff that they 'aven't...

KL: I spose it's just they've got rid of some of the cost in house themselves, you know if they're not havin' to do all the direct management and so on...

KW: That's right, that's right yeah.

KL: Do they make some cost savings to balance it out?

KW: Yeah....

KL: Which we don't know I spose...

KW: That's right..

KL: Without asking.

KW: That's right. An if you get...

KL: But still, there's the issue of the quality and everything else...

KW: That's right, yeah. But if you get 17 companies that are pricin' for the job, it's always, no matter what it's usually down to the bottom line is a figure, the amount a money...it'll go for the cheapest company.

KL: Mmm

KW: So you get 17 companies pricing for that, there's a lot of...there's a big scale from top to bottom, the biggest and the lowest amount a money.

KL: Yeah

KW: So there's all that paperwork for I spose the council to look through int there? Verify we're getting' the best value for money, compared to what we're gonna get, but then they don't know what they're gonna get. Because Killby and Gayford got that job....I went over supposedly to talk, initially talk with the stonemasons that were gonna do it, which was Fernival's' Killby and Gayford before the job started brought a different mason in, who'd never worked on a castle ruin before, and then it was only the fact that Fernival's turned 'round and said 'oh we can do this job now'. Cos Killby and Gayford got the job on the proviso of using myself and Fernivals. Fernivals couldn't do the job, but without tellin' the council, they brought another contractor in to do it. Well part a there pre-qualification questionnaire was 'which subcontractors are you gonna use?'

KL: Mmm, mmm

KW: So, 'ow would you verify that to the council, by sayin' 'it's a bit of a cock up what we've done. But we've used another mason'. 'Ow would ya...quantify that to somebody? Luckily they got Fernivals in, at the 9th hour or whatever, the 11th hour, they act...Fernivals turned 'round and said 'we can do it' as such. So they were lucky that way.

KL: Mmm. So initially they said they just couldn't do...couldn't fit it in?

KW: Thy couldn't do it, they couldn't do it in the timescale.

KL: Yeah.

KW: As it is now, they could do it 6 weeks later. And it's just, coincidental that it's 6 or 7 weeks late, is the contract. So it's obvious int it?

KL: Yeah, yeah.

KW: They've finished the contract, and then they've come and started that one, and then it's 6 or 7 weeks late.

KL: Mmm, yeah.

SN: Yeah. Well the only other thing I wanted to ask you...well there's two actually, two things. One of them is going back to...sort of like...erm choosing the jobs again. Now I know you said that you make a bad job a that...

KW: Uh huh yeah

SN: But, I was wonderin' if maybe it was because you don't choose jobs on how easy there, or how erm, y'know...

KW: A lot a the jobs its 'ow interestin' they are.

SN: Yeah, exactly.

KW: 'Ow interestin' they are, yeah. Like, this is quite an interestin' job, this one.

SN: Yeah.

KW: Erm, why we're chasin' our tail as such on this one, is because we were sposed to start it in April. But the chap in charge of it fell ill, and so it didn't start until end of September, October, summit like that, so...

SN: Right.

KW: ...straightaway we're into the winter period startin' this job, so... This, in another week or fortnight, it'll close down and we'll 'ave to start again next year.

SN: OK.

KW: But it was an interestin' job to do, an it'd 'ave been a piece a cake to 'ave done it in summer

SN: Uh huh.

KW: But it just didn't turn out that way. So again, I've chose the wrong job 'aven't I? Cos I expected in summer to be doin' this, then we take the Dog and Duck on and all of a sudden this one comes back on the 'orizon.

SN: Yeah.

KW: So straightaway we've got 2 jobs that are runnin' at £100,000 a piece, in the same town, err...so, I've chose wrong there, y'know. We decided to a stone extension for somebody, and then all of a sudden these two jobs come up, £200,000 worth of work that 'ave to be started immediately.

SN: Erm.

KW: So I never choose the right job.

SN: No.

KW: I try and choose the most interesting one...

SN: It's interesting for you, so that clearly motivates you quite a lot, like the challenges and the thinking and stuff...

KW: Yes, yes

SN: What about everybody else? Do you think everybody else that you work with, is that something that gets them...?

KW: Yeah...most...everybody that's come to work for me obviously, y'know, I mean Liam 'as worked for me for I think it's 9 years now Liam, and 'e'd never done anything... 'E'd been a labourer but 'e'd never done nothing with lime. And th then suddenly, well slowly 'e got into the lime. Matty was a plasterer, trained as a normal plasterer, but we've got 'im now running...well not running moulds, patching moulds and lime, flat lime plastering. An 'e, everybody that's come to work for me 'ave, joined in on the enthusiasm. I say everybody that works for me are really keen on lime.

SN: Right.

KW: Y'know, and I can't ask for more, than that. A couple a brick layers, every now and again they say 'well I wish I were just walling bricks', cos it's...you can just turn off you know...

KL: Mmmm

KW: Can't ya? But everybody that works for me 'ave an interest. Even the joiners, even though they're subcontractors, when I tell them, right 'well we'll do this, we'll use draw pegs' and so on like. They're keen to do it as well. They like

doing this work. So luckily, we've got an interested workforce. And if they're interested they'll try and do a better job. Than just doing something they're not bothered about y'know.

KL: Is there a bit of a danger there though as well, in terms of conflict between your personal interest and makin' a profit, ya know...

KW: Oh we don't...

KL: ...and getting distracted? Or just getting too much into it?

KW: That's right, yeah, yeah. There's nobody ever's gonna make a big profit in conservation work. This is why, y'know if Ian Constantinides can't make it work, and St Blaise, who can? Y'know you just get carried away with things.

KL: So it is the way of life and the satisfaction...

KW: Yeah, cos things change so quickly on site. Y'know, we were diggin' down there...lit...we were diggin' that trench down there, we found a few bits of pot, a few bones, archaeologist chap was there for two days, never found a thing. Erm, Matty was workin'...it all 'ad to be 'and dug. Matty was workin' at one side a the trench, I'd been workin' e're, so we were literally this distance apart. I left a little ledge, there's a step down, there a foundation...left this little ledge, Kev jumps in and says 'do you want me to take this ledge out?'. And I said 'well I'm not really bothered Kev, don't matter'. 'E said 'I will do', it was only a little ledge, like that. Puts 'is pick through it, found a culvert. All of a sudden that's a fortnight's worth of work lost. Y'know cos they 'ave to come and scrape it off, and photograph it, and measure it.

SN: Yeah.

KW: So...with a cons...unless you're unlucky you won't find that in a normal building site...

SN: No.

KW: You know, once you start workin', y'know, findin' things in the walls, all of a sudden you 'ave to stop. We 'aven't found coins, but we've found clay pipes and things like that, so all of a sudden we 'ave to stop that way. So at least with the heritage work it is very interestin', that there's always an unknown that you may find somewhere. That's we work for.

SN: If you were less interested, and possibly less scrupulous, then you could just cover it up?

KW: Yeah but we don't.

SN: No I know you don't. But you could....

KW: You could do yes...

SN: And the way that the contract works, it would actually financially maybe be in your favour to.

KW: It would, as I say, when I...I didn't put the foundations in. We did some work over there. The lads found that breast plate, and they said 'we're not showin' this to anybody'. Moye from English 'Eritage was comin' up once a week, and said 'we certainly aren't telling 'im.

SN: Yeah.

KW: Or else that woulda been stopped.

SN: Yeah.

KW: And they might have found even more Roman stuff over there, we don't know, but... They didn't. If it'd been me I think I would've had to have told somebody, y'know. Said 'look'.... But we found a skull in this, where ya comin' up this road, we found a skull...it was years ago, 15, nah 13 or 14 years ago. When we first started workin' 'ere. The gardener came across and said 'what d'ya think a this Steve, we found this skull'... And it had a hole in the top. It was just in the nettles, just comin' outa the soil as such.

SN: Mmmm.

KW: We picked it up and took it across to Norris, and saw 'im, and said 'we've found this'. Norris was the owner. What do want us to do? 'Oh Crikey, I don't know what to do'. Do we ring the archaeological people up, do we ring English 'Eritage? Anyway, a couple a nights later, it musta been off like Shakespeare, y'know the Yorick or.... An ex-po...a policeman walked in, a detective, t'ave a drink in the bar, and 'e says...and Norris turned around and said to 'im 'if one was to find a skull in such a sensitive area. Not 'ere, but somewhere else in Richardtown, what would one do with it?'. The bloke said well 'ave you got any oth...', this was the detective, 'ave you got any other evidence to collate what it was, where it come from?'.

'No, no it just sort of appeared in this person's garden'. 'E said

'I would just bury it an...and not say anything to anybody'.

KL: Haha.

KW: So that's what Norris did. So the rest of the work could carry on you see.

SN: Yeah.

KW: That could be part a the Roman burial ground as such.

SN: Yeah.

KW: But it had a hole through, as if a sword or summit like that...cos certainly we never did it when we dug it out. It was, it was...stickin' through... This was all, this section was all wild. It was all little saplings and all sorts. Along this section, it'd never been used. Since years maybe. So the skull 'ad been poppin' up all that time as such. It was just coincidence that an ex-detective 'appened to come into this pub.

SN: Ahaha. It would 'ave been worse if it 'ad been an archaeologist.

KW: That's right, yeah.

KL: Yes! Ahh.

SN: And the other thing was just about apprentices, because I notice that... of the people that you work with, none of them 'ave come to you as apprentices have they?

KL: We took an apprentice on 2 or 3 years ago, Sam Beard, and we took 'im on as a bricklayer apprentice. Basically because we wanted basic skill set at first, and I don't mean this nasty, but if you don't come into the basic skill set you become a bit arty farty about lime, you become it 'it's so precious', you know. But if you come in as a tradesman that's interested in it, you're still able to do your work and do it correctly, in my opinion. So anyway we took Sam on, and

then 'e just went wild. 'E just, a couple a weekends 'e just went wild, and then, when 'e'd actually left, w found out, and it's, it's not a nice thing, 'e found out on 'is 18th birthday that 'e was adopted.

SN: Right. Oh right.

KW: And so 'e just flipped, 'e just went y'know drinkin' and allsorts, like y'know.

SN: Mmm.

KW: An, so since then, we've not really bothered with apprentices. Because in all honesty, I think they're a bit immature at the moment.

KL: Mmmm.

KW: When I did my City and Guilds, and we were there 4 years, erm and we worked up until 7 o'clock at night, when we were doin' the, when 'e was doin' 'is City and Guilds brickwork, 'e wasn't goin' until 10 o'clock on a mornin' to Scarborough, and 'e was leavin' at 4 o'clock. And 'e did it in 2 years, and we did it in 4 years. And we're sayin' 'well 'ow can you be as good a bricklayer?'

SN: Mmm

KW: Ya can't, ya course is 'alf the time. So it's, oh well 'I'll get an apprenticeship at the end of it'. So, I still don't think the apprenticeships are up to what they were 30 years ago.

SN: No.

KW: It's bums on seats in my opinion. I've witnessed that by going back to college, cos I was older than the teachers at college, I was older than Harry Charles, and older than Bill and the other one. Harry Charles.

SN: Yes, I know.

KW: So I'm older than those, so in all I could say what I wanted to them. Even given Roger Maynard a cossin' for drinkin' coffee in front of us in the classroom. Settin' a bad example. Hahaha! Well 'e came in one day and 'e was goin' on that people were late, and I came in one day at about 5 past 9, cos there was an accident on the A64 there, and 'e came an 'e says 'Ken, ya late', and I says 'I am late, I'm sorry, yeah, I couldn't 'elp it'. 'E says 'well don't do it again'.

'I won't, I'm really sorry' I said, 'but don't you walk out of 'ere at 10 past 9 and go an 'ave a cup a coffee and come back in at quarter to 10, by just puttin' summit on the board, to read such and such'. I said 'I want you 'ere all the time like'.

'I don't do that, I don't do that'. And 'e walked off, went got a cup a coffee. 'E ame back in with a cup a coffee, and I said

'That's what I'm talkin' about Roger. Don't criticise me for bein' 5 minutes late, when you're not actually fulfilling what we expect of you as tutor, as teachers, as children, y'know pupils.

SN: Yeah.

KW: So I can be a bit feisty at times..

KL: Haha.

SN: Well I think that's everything from me.

KL: Yeah, I think we've more or less covered...

KW: Was it useful or not?

KL: Yeah...

SN: Yeah definitely...

KL: Interesting, yeah...

SN: Really interesting.

KW: Not too controversial?

SN: No, no it's good...

Herb Glover, Firm08BS. Date unrecorded.

SN: I'm working for the university part time, and erm, doing a PhD at the same time. So I've got more, erm, I'm more involved with the teaching that I was, helping with the *muffled*, but I'm also doing like an undergraduate module. So that's quite good. Well I'm starting it next year actually, so I've not idea whether it's good or not, so I'm looking forward to it. Erm, and then the other stuff...we'll talk about my PhD in the session...and the other stuff I'm working on erm, tryin' to get some apprenticeships []. Err, the estates that are based in there. So *muffled* some charities and stuff like that, and have got some money together to place 3 apprentices on 3 different estates in Yorkshire.

HG: Right. And is this part of the work you do for the university or is it part of the NHTA?

SN: Well, I'm not paid to do any NHTA anymore, so it kind of came out of that, and then now it's just, I'm just tryin' to, y'know, keep it alive until the funding all gets *muffled*, and then pay for it through the university but not for university purposes, if you know what I mean.

HG: Mmm.

SN: Yeah.

HG: So they're payin'?

SN: Well, I don't know, I do quite a lot of it in my own time.

HG: Do you?

SN: Yeah.

HG: Right.

SN: Yeah. But now, I hope it...I think it's gonna be good, I hope it...I think it's gonna be a good thing. Basically, and I've been doing some bits and pieces with Clovers Education. Do you work with them still?

HG: No, no, no. They sort of backed out of the project.

SN: Really...?

HG: Still...never got a satisfactory explanation from 'im, but 'e just, all of a sudden they just said 'that's it, finished'.

SN: What the Heritage Lottery Funding?

HG: Yeah.

SN: Oh I wondered...I haven't heard you talk about each other for a while..

HG: Yeah.

SN: So who's running it now for you?

HG: Sally's having to do it.

SN: Right, right. I didn't know that.

HG: Mmmm. No, it's very disappointing.

SN: ...really disappointing...

HG: I suspect 'e's got other, y'know, committed elsewhere.

SN: I know, yeah.

HG: But 'e didn't say so.

SN: And it was just a total shock?

HG: Mmm, yeah.

SN: We'll talk about that another time... Because, erm, we digress a little bit, erm... Kim and I are workin' together, we both work at the university, erm we have shared interest in small, medium sized enterprises...

HG: Yep

SN: I'm interest in errr the relationship between crafts, crafts companies and the kind of conservation sector, and Kim is interested erm in small companies and the wider supply chain, she's got a particular interest in the public sector. Er, so we're kind of working together, part of my PhD, but also part of Kim's research, erm, to analyse craft, craft companies in Yorkshire, and think about how they might be different from other construction companies and how they relate to the public sector. Err, so we just, conducting these kind of semi-structured interviews, where we've got a few themes to look at. We'll probably ask you, maybe, I don't know, 4 or 5 or 6 questions, and then you just are free to tell us about your experiences.

HG: Oh right, go on.

SN: So, the first thing I was gonna ask you, is because I'm interested in training, is how you got to be where you are, and a little bit about the people that work for you, and how they got to be where they are, and whether there's one way into doing what you do or...

HG: How I got to be where I am. Well, I started as a blacksmith, not because it was a good career path, but because it seemed like an attractive thing to do. Erm, and that was a long time ago. And erm, yes, it seems to have worked out reasonably well. Erm... and I spose you're really interested in how, what opportunities there are for other people aren't you, for young people.

SN: Well yeah, I think so, but you're not apprenticeship trained are you?

HG: No, no blacksmith would be today. There's no such thing as an apprenticeship. Erm, erm we...there are certain bursaries available erm, in Europe, not, not in Britain really. By the looks of it...NHIG But erm, that's a bit of an anomaly really. There is no real training route for blacksmiths now, unless you go on the full time course at Hereford College.

SN: Oh really? A full time course.

HG: Yeah. 1, 2, or 3 years you can do that.

SN: But isn't it day release? Don't you have to go there...

HG: No, no, no, that, that the block release course was finished. That got cut.

SN: Oh.

HG: Now they are starting another one, which is, they've managed to find mainstream funding for it. Err, and that's starting in March apparently.

SN: Uh huh

HG: But it's so new we don't know anything about it yet. Erm, but as to moves to training for young people, what they normally have to do is go on the journey. Y'know they go and work for people.

SN: Uh huh.

HG: And err, they only ones who subscribe to that process are the ones who have real aptitude. They wouldn't go on a journey if they weren't motivated, would they?

SN: No.

HG: But no, as regards career training, erm, Hereford's the...that's it... And I don't know much about their course I've had people that've been on it...

SN: Yeah.

HG: Of course, but quite to whom it's available and how much you have to pay for it, I couldn't tell you.

SN: Do they pay themselves then?

HG: I don't know.

SN: Right.

HG: I don't know...I've no idea. You could easily find out from Hereford.

SN: What...OK...so you're saying there's kind of no one set route into blacksmithing...

HG: No.

SN: There's just working with other people, and... are you sort of like a member of Cskills or anything like that? ConstructionSkills? Are you seen as a construction company?

HG: No. No, we approached ConstructionSkills through NHIG to get the, you know, NOS sorted out...

SN: Yeah.

HG: ...and all the rest of it. But that was completely...as regards to the company there's not tie up with anybody like that.

SN: Really? There's no sector skills council?

HG: We don't have anything to do with them.

SN: Right.

HG: We don't, you know, have any correspondence with anybody of that kind.

SN: Uh huh.

HG: We're very much left to do it on our own.

SN: Right.

HG: And erm, as a result of that, most of our intake of employees if you like, are from abroad.

SN: Right.

HG: Because there's a far more rigorous emphasis on training abroad than there is here. Y'know whether that's because people from other countries are more motivated, or err intrinsically more skilled... I doubt it really, I suspect the skills exist in this country but the, err, for one reason or another most of our intake is from abroad.

KL: So, if you take people for abroad, are they coming with the skills already?

HG: Yeah.

KL: Do you ever take anybody on completely fresh?

HG: No.

KL: You don't. Is that sort of a decision on...

HG: It would be far too costly.

KL: Right.

HG: Far too costly, and too much of a chance. As I say, somebody who comes to work with us would have to demonstrate some kind of motivation. And so we wait for them to come to us.

KL: Right.

HG: And, err, it would be very unusual for us to take on anybody who was completely unskilled. We'd probably say 'no, no, you've got to demonstrate in some way'...at least go on a course...

KL: Yeah.

HG: A weekend course or whatever...do something to show us that actually you've got what it takes to make the grade, because it's not an easy thing to do. And we do need people who are very motivated. Cos it's not easy to make money at this job. Y'know, it's very easy to lose it, not easy to make it. And it's all down to the speed of the people, the speed and the competency of the people who are on the shop floor. And if anybody's not pullin' their weight, then it can let the whole team down.

KL: Mmm.

HG: So we wouldn't look for...we wouldn't look for 16 year olds or anything like that.

KL: Uh huh.

HG: I mean we would if we were given assistance to do it I spose. Y'know like the old apprenticeship schemes, y'know, you used to have some time of assistance from the government didn't you, for takin' people on. But, erm, y'know, and we have taken people before now erm, on erm, grant aided schemes. Y'know, one particular guy I'm thinking of. Err, came to us for about 2 years, on...and he was, he was supported erm, by various different bodies who managed to get more bursary for him after the first year's work. But, err, it all...it didn't actually work out because he wasn't, wasn't the right kind of material. Y'know to...it was more therapy for him. Hahaha...than good business for us...so we had to let him go because 'e just couldn't keep up.

SN: So how do they get to that first level? Y'know the people that do come here to work? How do they get to that first level?

HG: Well, they ei...they've either been to Hereford College...

SN: Uh huh

HG: Or they're, they've been working in the industry previously...

SN: Uh huh. But for a different company.

HG: For different people. We occasionally get people that've got a year's experience maybe with other different companies.

SN: Yeah.

HG: Erm, or yeah, I mean we'd take anybody on for 3 weeks...

SN: Uh huh

HG: ...more or less. If we happen to be busy, and that normal route is that somebody'll email us or phone us and say 'can I have a job?', and they say... well if they say no at that point, then we would reconsidered...ha.. But, erm, and then y'know we might say well y'know, 'fair enough, you can come for a couple of weeks, we'll see how it goes'.

SN: Uh huh.

HG: And then some of them succeed and some of them fail.

SN: Mmm

HG: We don't take a right lot of people on. I mean our people don't tend to leave here, so I don't have err, a lot of openings, y'know.

SN: How long to people tend to stay for?

HG: Ffff, well the longest one's 14 years.

SN: Right.

HG: Erm, we do have err....if, if you're thinkin' about regular training schemes, we do actually operate one for the compagnons de devoirs, which of course French people...

SN: Uh huh.

HG: And they are very organised, and they send us 1, or this year in fact we've got 2, people who are here for a year. But they're very much learning on the job, because they come to us with skills already. We don't...we wouldn't...we wouldn't accept people from the lowest grade of the compagnons shall we say, the beginners. We wouldn't accept those because we're not a training establishment.

KL: Uh huh

HG: And err, we tend to get people who have 5 or 6 years experience with the compagnons. Having been sent out to different companies, usually in France.

SN: Uh huh.

HG: Err and they come to us for 12 months. Part of it is to improve their English, and part to learn the skills that we have to impart. And that's a regular thing, and that's been goin' on for almost 15 years.

SN: Uh huh.

KL: Right.

HG: That is very much driven by the compagnons, not by us.

SN: No, I know yeah

KL: And do, people come with, with with, kind of the same skills...I'm just thinking, y'know, somebody who comes from the scheme you've just talked about, the French one, or say from Hereford College, are you taking on people with the same all round set of skills, or do you have specialists in particular areas?

HG: To some extent it doesn't matter what the skill level of the person is in our specified...I mean to work here that other companies don't do...

KL: Uh huh.

HG: So we'd be very lucky to find people that had the full set of skills that we need. Erm, but it's not really down to skill, it's more down to application...

KL: OK.

HG: It's, it's down to intelligence, y'know, an ounce of intelligence is worth a tonne of experience. Err, people who can solve problems...

KL: Right.

HG: ...tend to learn very quickly.

KL: Uh huh

HG: And if they're also motivated to to what we are doing, then, then y'know then you've got good material there.

KL: Uh huh.

HG: Erm, so it wouldn't be any use at all, takin' somebody off the street, y'know, who have no particular motivation apart from the fact that "e needed a job mate', erm, a complete waste of time for us. Wouldn't be a good team member...or, not necessarily gonna be a good team member.

KL: Uh huh

HG: You know, to take somebody on and tart them sweepin' up and makin' the tea is just not the way it's done anymore.

KL: No, no.

HG: Cos it's bloody expensive. Y'know, if I take a 16 year old on, erm, well 18 year old shall we say. More realistic. It's gonna be costing me £10 an hour to employ that person. Well, y'know, even if I pay 'im £6. It'll probably cost more, probably cost £15 an hour to employ 'em. Well he's gotta make, he's gotta make...we're not a charity, y'know. We can't afford to carry a lot a dead wood around, and erm, he's got to make me that money back again, at the very least. And you're talking about, on the job training, well, y'know, somebody comes in and they need to be taught. Who's gonna teach 'em? A guy who costs me £25 an hour. So, it just, it just doesn't work. Y'know, it's impossible to sustain it. Y'know if we were makin' pots of money, y'know, it might be a different matter. But the margins just aren't there any more.

KL: When you say any more...is that something that's...

HG: Well this is the way it must've been done at one time, y'know...

KL: ... very specific to this...Right OK.

HG: Y'know, wasn't it. You'd have a company the size of us would maybe take 1 young person on every year, and incorporate them in the work force, and err, y'know, thus the company would grow, and they must've been able to afford to train these people, within the company, because that's the way it was done, that's what apprenticeships were all about.

KL: Mmm.

HG: That's why it took 7 years I spose. But, we just couldn't afford to do it now.

SN: Do you think that's something particular about blacksmithing? Cos there are companies out there that do do that aren't there?

HG: Oh I would...I don't know really. To be honest, I don't know about other companies.

SN: There are small companies out there that do take...not somebody every year, maybe somebody every 5 years...

HG: Yeah, yeah. Well if it was somebody who was motivated. Y'know, an 18 year old could get a job here if he was really motivated.

SN: Mmmm.

HG: But a lot of it would have to come from him. I'm not gonna go out lookin' for 'em.

SN: No.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

HG: Y'know, and there are people around who, I would think, 'mmm, well they're young but, look pretty good'.

SN: Well moving on from that a little bit, you talked a bit about erm qualities of work..no you didn't. You talked about somebody having to be able to problem solve, and so, why is that important? What is it about the work that you do that makes that quality in somebody important?

HG: Erm, it's amazing how different people are. There are people who you need to tell how to do the once, and the you can rest perfectly well assured that that will be done properly. There are lots of people of there who you can tell, they'll do it wrong. Cos they're not listening, or their not bothered. Or they're thick. And then you 'ave to tell 'em again. Meanwhile, they're making...they're doing damage. You know they're destroying materials, making mistakes, and it's amazing how many people there are around like that.

SN: Is that because they're just not following the procedure properly, or is it because they're making the wrong decisions?

HG: I don't know...I think some people are just not capable of taking it in. I don't know. And it, it's all very much down to the individual. Y'know..

SN: Right. Does that apply to both sets? Cos do you not have 2 teams here? 1...

HG: We have 2 workshops, but I wouldn't say we have 2 teams really.

SN: But you do 2 different things don't you? 1 of them's blacksmithing, and 1 of them's wrought iron manufacture?

HG: Yeah, yeah...

SN: But everyone does everything..?

HG: Sort of. Not everyone does everything, but yeah there's a big overlap.

SN: Right. And you need the same level of skill for both different types of work?

HG: Well, we wouldn't necessarily take people on on the rolling mill. We've got a team at the rolling mill who are not looking for any help on that, so... Erm... Same level of, erm, well I was gonna use the word commitment...yeah, the same level of commitment, yeah across the board, yeah. Yeah, I mean if you've got a small team like this, it's a very tight team...

SN: How many of you are there?

HG: 15. Erm, if anybody came into the team who wasn't pulling their weight, or they did not perceive was capable of pulling their weight, I'd soon hear about it, because it would cause ripples, it would cause all sorts of undercurrents. You know, people would start complaining. And it would make them unhappy, cos everybody...they're very jealous about what they do, y'know, they do actually like to give full value. And if they see someone who's not giving full value, I'll find out about it.

SN: Right OK.

HG: You know, so there's no room for anybody slacking, or... I mean, and to be honest, you don't normally find that people are...I mean there are people around that who come at a job and they just sit there and, y'know, hope to do as little as possible for a maximum gain. Y'know, there are such people. And, there are in the workforce. We haven't got any like that. And, but it would also apply if somebody came and they just haven't got the aptitude for it. Y'know, I mean, not that people are gonna be unhelpful towards them, but y'know, just, it does sometimes...you begin to appreciate that perhaps that guy is in the wrong job, y'know.

SN: Uh huh.

HG: And so we have to do something about that.

SN: Yeah. OK. So....

HG: It's not kind of like British industry used to be in the days of the railways, where people could hide away and pass unnoticed if they were skiving, or, y'know, the quality of their work wasn't up to scratch. It's just not like that any more.

SN: Right. And do you think they find that kind of motivating in any way? The fact that they do have to achieve certain levels?

HG: Yeah, very much so.

SN: So they like being the best?

HG: They do, they do spark off one another a bit, yeah.

SN: Right.

HG: Yeah...there's...it's a bit, it is, to some extent, aspirational.

SN: Right.

HG: They come along and 'I'd like to work with him'. He's really good, sorta thing.

SN: And is that through the blacksmithing industry, or is that just you?

HG: Well it certainly applies here...

SN: Yeah.

HG: And I thinking the in, in...yeah, it's not erm...this is not a field...this is not a meat packing company, y'know, it's not some... People don't go into it y'know because they think that's a way of making a living...

SN: Uh huh

HG: They don't go into it for that reason, none of the people in there are actually...some of the people in the office might be like that, but...But they go into it because they had some kind of passion for it.

SN: Uh huh.

HG: And so that probably makes it a bit different to, to common run of industry...I suppose...it's a bit like that with other craft industries...I would expect to find that in stone carving and ornamental plastering, and stained glass, and so on and so forth.

SN: Yeah.

HG: So they will start with an interest in the job, won't they?

SN: Uh huh.

HG: Mmmm.

KL: Yes, yes, what's kind of intriguing, it's a bit sort of chicken and egg in a sense. Y'know, how do you know you've got the passion for something, y'know the blacksmith area...

HG: Well I wait for them to come to me.

KL: ...if you...well, I don't mean a particular firm, but erm, y'know, it must be hard to find that out until you can actually have a go...quite difficult to get in and have a go...

HG: Well that's what people do.

KL: Mmm...

HG: You know, some of them will go and they'll erm find somebody they can work with. Although it's very difficult to do that now, because most blacksmiths...I mean most blacksmiths are not doing what we're doing, y'know we're more, we're a lot more industrial than most blacksmiths. Most blacksmiths are art based, y'know, so they're really very creative people who are making things out of metal.

KL: Uh huh

HG: Err, and their usually one-man bands. Because they're not in general ambitious business people, they're in general they ahhh just wanna be doing what they're doing, and y'know make a decent living doing something they like to do. And err, so they tend to be one man bands. So it's not vey easy for them to give training to anybody.

KL: Mmmm...

HG: Because it's even worse as a one man band. I mean we had Granville Peck who you might know, a blacksmith from Stockton, on the bursary scheme. And he...y'know, the bursary scheme involves sending somebody to him completely free of charge. And he had to give it up...

SN: Really?

HG: Yeah. He was spending too much time teaching them

SN: Right.

HG: He couldn't get his work done.

SN: How long was 'e doing it for?

HG: He did it for 3, 4 months.

SN: How long was he sposed to do it for?

HG: 2 years.

SN: Gosh

HG: And he said 'look, I can't have 'em, I can't have the next student. I've got work to do'. Which isn't the way it's supposed to be.

KL: So he was entirely on his own?

HG: Yeah, 'e's a bit of an extreme case. Cos 'e's such a nice guy 'e will give people loads and loads a time, and y'know, 'e's 'is own worst enemy in a way. But it is that sort of thing, you know. If somebody came into your workshop and you weren't immediately useful, then it starts to be a drain. And, erm, almost everybody in this, industry shall we say, in this line of work is just about making a living.

KL: Mmmm.

HG: Y'know, there's no surplus, there's no padding. If the prices were twice what they are it'd be a different matter, but they're not. Y'know, competition has driven the prices right down, so...there's no spare, there's no slack.

SN: Mmm

HG: That's what it's all about. You want to train people, you want to put people in jobs, then put some money into the system. Y'know, so then people can be more relaxed about training and taking people on, and spending their time with them, and that sort of thing.

SN: Yeah. So, on kind of the subject of competition...when you say that, do you mean with regard to tendering rules?

HG: Tendering is, yeah, that is very, very damaging. Very, very harmful to the craft industry. Having to do things on a tender basis. Cos tenders are based on, assessed on the basis of least cost. Least cost means people cut corners, and there's no room for training.

KL: Mmmm

HG: So tendering is really, really bad news for quality. You're talking about quality here, you know. Craft, craft based businesses are all based on quality in one way or another. And err tendering is the worst thing, and if we could get better from a tendering situation we'd be an awful lot happier...I mean people'd be an awful lot more prosperous.

SN: Do you find though...is there any jobs that you do that you don't have to tender for?

HG: Yeah. Now we're beginning to find, fortunately, that we're workin' on....the work that we've got on at the moment, we haven't actually had to tender for any of it.

SN: The work where...?

HG: The work that we have got on at the moment.

SN: Right.

KL: So who would the clients be then that erm that you're working for where you don't have to tender?

HG: They're people who have responded to a recommendation from someone, someone else. Y'know...it's a case of 'we want you to do it', not 'how much is it gonna cost?'

KL: Right.

SN: Is it mainly private clients then?

KL: It's partly private clients, and partly not. Yeah. It's a bit of a mixture.

SN: But not public sector?

HG: No. Public sector work's dried up.

SN: Has it?

KL: Really?

HG: Pretty well.

SN: Right. Cos you were doing a lot of bandstands at one point weren't you?

HG: Err, yeah. That was a Lottery funded job. That was last year, that was the year before. Mmm.

SN: Right OK.

HG: Right OK. I mean Lottery funding is good in that there's a lot of money in the system that isn't err, wouldn't 'ave been there otherwise. And when they pay attention to standards it can actually result in very good work. But they'll always go by the tender procedure. And err, as I say, that actually militates against quality.

KL: And is that what you've found with the heritage work then? You've found that they were going for cost...

HG: HLF?

KL: Yeah.

HG: No, HLF, when they're on the ball, what they, they, we have had work from the Heritage Lottery Fund which 'as been unbelievably good, and it's been specified very well by people who are really, really keen to get best quality. But they very often fall down, they very often don't give it that kind of attention. In which case, you know what happens...it goes for least cost and they end up with stuff that isn't of best quality.

KL: So, so the specification is that a good indicator then really, of whether they're going to take into account quality? How well drawn out...

HG: You can tell at the...you can usually tell at the point of receiving the tender whether or not it's gonna be worth bothering. Because very often, you know you're with...it'll be a lovely job...'no, where's the specification? Isn't one'. In which case we just put it on one side, cos there's no, you know, we're against cheap Jack. Y'know, we're always gonna be cheaper than cheap Jack.

KL: And so, does it, do you think it does require expertise in the particular, I don't know whether it's the craft area, or the period of the building, or...but it requires somebody with expertise to draw up an appropriate specification then?

HG: Yeah. I think so. In actual fact, we're talking about training and education, and the training and education should start with the client. Y'know, whoever that is manifest as...whether it's the architect, or conservation officer, or whoever else it might be.

KL: Uh huh.

HG: They are the ones who need educating.

KL: And do people ever ask for your input in terms of helping to influence the specification?

HG: To write one?

KL: Yes. Do you get consulted on that?

HG: Yeah, yeah yeah. Yeah. It's not very often and sometimes you've got to fight pretty hard for it, and very often you lose. But erm, it does happen. Y'know, people are aware...I've not detected a lot of arrogance out there. People,

y'know, the commissioners of work, or you know, the people who are holding the money bags very often realise that they are not properly equipped to writes specifications, or whatever.

KL: Right.

HG: Erm, but, I mean, don't forget that what we're doing is usually, in any, if you're talking about, I suppose the field you'd be interested in would be err, refurbishment of building probably, y'know.

KL: Uh huh

HG: Our element is usually tiny compared with the rest of it. And it usually, or , yeah, usually I suppose is fair enough, gets neglected.

KL: Right

HG: It's such a small part of the total package that they obviously haven't spent any time on it at all.

KL: And so would, would it be a main contractor then that would be left to sort out the detail of that part of the job?

HG: Yeah. Normally what would happen would be that a specification would be written by an architect, or a commissioning agent of one sort or another, a QS or somebody. Err, together with the drawings and all the rest of it. And then it's the main contra...they'll go out to half a dozen main contractors, who are all have to deliver least cost, don't they? Or attempt to deliver least cost. Well they are not gonna go for using expensive subcontractors. They'll get away with...they'll cut it right down to the bone. And we've had many occasions where we've put prices into main contractors, they won the job, and they they've tried to undercut us by going to someone else. Having got the go ahead, y'know on the basis of the specification, then they dive right underneath us because they find somebody who can do it for half our price. And I've actually had to take people to court before now. Y'know, look , that is not the specification so this is not a fair tender, and I spent my time putting that tender in, and I'm going to have the work thank you very much, cos I quoted you for the work according to the spec. And sometimes you have to get really nasty about it. So once it's got to the point of the main contractor main' the choice you've lost it.

SN: Oh really?

HG: Usually you've lost it. Because they're not interested in quality, they're interested in price. Because they had to tender, they had to go in at the lowest cost, y'know. This lowest cost thing is really dreadful.

KL: Mmm.

HG: All the time. And it's actually not lowest cost at all...erm...

KL: Well yes exactly, it depends what you take into acc...

HG: It's not lowest cost...

KL: ...the maintenance and...

HG: ...especially when it comes to renovation, you know of grade 1 listed ironwork, being assessed on a lowest cost tender basis. Y'know, what' that all about? When there's no accreditation, there's no...you know, no...restriction on who people can go to...for the work. You know? Ripon Cathedral's a case in point...they're doin' a loada work of the west entrance there. And they...all this, you know, 13th century door iron work...you get a tender through and it says

'refurbish hinges'. Huh? You gonna tell us what wants doing? 'Oh well we can't do that'. You know, well I more or less said

'well, OK, bye bye'.

KL: So they said they can't do it because they don't have the knowledge?

HG: Yeah, it's not in the spec. You know, It's a very, very small part of a very big job, and you know...eventually I spoke to erm *muffled* and said, look 'you should not be letting work on grade 1 listed ironwork on a least cost tender basis'. Because there's not accreditation, you don't know who the bloody hell they're gonna use, y'know, and it'll come back...with, you know, completely irredeemable damage done to it.

KL: I would 'ave expected, that they had...if it's grade 1 listed, do they not have to get somebody in to prove the...

HG: Well there's no accreditation! There's not official way of assessing the quality of a metal worker.

KL: Right, so...OK.

HG: There is no qualification.

KL: Due to the particular nature of your work...

HG: You know, you can't ask to see his certificates, cos there are no certificates in existence.

KL: Right.

HG: And as I say, once it's gone to the main contractor, the main contractor will just go to the guy who, first of all he can rely on, cos 'e's used 'im before probably, and will give 'im the least cost. And all considerations of, you know, conservation ethics, go completely out the window. Very often. I mean it doesn't always happen that way...

SN: So with Ripon Cathedral, is that being managed by a main contractor now?

HG: Probably, I don't know. As I say, I, declined to give them a price. I said 'we'd be very, very interested in working on this, this is exactly our kind of thing, but I'm not gonna give you a price'.

SN: So in that instance, did the architect not specify it properly? Or somebody didn't specify it properly.

HG: Well the architect wouldn't be able to specify it properly.

SN: Right, OK.

HG: You now, not without takin' it to bits, you know. Mend it, you know, there it is, mend it. 'Oh OK. Fair enough. What needs mending?'

'Oh, we don't know. How do we know?'

KL: So how do you get around the situation...

SN: Yeah.

KL: ...like that then?

HG: We back out.

KL: No, but...

SN: No but how would it ever work out well?

HG: How could it work out well? But putting a contingency figure in, and appoin...either appointing somebody. Y'know, effectively appointing somebody...so we know these people are...

KL: So in appointing somebody, how are they making the choice then?

HG: Well the only way you can do it now is on track record.

KL: Track record. OK.

HG: The only way you can do it. You have to go to a practitioner, and you have to say 'whow us what you've done in the past. Show us what you can do'. I mean this is why we set up the NHIG, because we are writing specifications, we are writing a set of conservation principles, so people have something to refer to. At the moment there's absolutely nothing.

KL: I, I spose the problem then is how do you ever get a track record? Because you're just gonna keep going to the same people all the time aren't you?

HG: Yeah, yeah

KL: So your market situation is...

HG: I don't know, I don't know. Takes a long time.

KL: Ahh...yes. Yes.

HG: I'm as bad as anybody else! I didn't have any training!

KL: That's what I mean...obviously you got...you've got there...

HG: I set up doing conservation work, I was probably doing it all wrong. Y'know, I well may be doing it wrong now. Somebody needs to tell me otherwise...

SN: And when you say 'doing it wrong', can you tell us what you mean?

HG: I'll tell you what I mean when we've got our conservation principles written.

SN: Well, no, there is things like using the wrong materials, and steel welding, and electric welding.

HG: Oh! Erm, I don't know...I'll give you a case in point. I could show you photographs, but I'm not going to. Erm, very large, grade II* listed set of erm gates at the n, n, next...really next door to the houses of parliament. Owned by the parliamentary works estate, or whatever they call them. Erm, major piece of work, huge, absolutely huge entrance. Was restored 9 years ago, or 9 years before we got to it, by people who shall remain nameless. Err, absolutely dreadful. Completely and absolutely diabolically disgustingly awful work. A truck ran into to it fortunately, and the architect got on to me and said 'truck ran into our gates', so I said

'I know what you mean. This means it's an opportunity to do the job properly this time'. He said

'Yeah'. I said

'How you gonna do it? Are you gonna go out to tender?'

'Can't go out to tender?'

'Why not?'

'Cos the people who did it last time would have to be on the tender list.' So they gave us the work. They actually gave the work to us. Now that was 9 years...they'd paid a fortune 9 years ago to have the gates restored. We had to un-restore them again. That isn't less, least cost. That is y'know....as long as they don't run any more trucks into them, the work that we have done, which may well not have won in a tender situation, won't need doing again 50 or 60 years.

KL: So is that...

HG: ...where's the least cost...

KL: ...wrong materials that are being used there?

HG: Wrong materials, erm, inadequate craftsmanship, really, really erm...probably complied with the letter of whatever dreadful specification was used at the time... But no, it was just really, really bad. I mean a lot of it you wouldn't have...y'know if it had been a project at 'a' level metal work, you wouldn't have passed 'em. That was on grade II* listed work. I can show you this stuff...we kept, we kept the...

SN: I think I've got some photos...is it commissioner yard?

HG: Yeah, commissioners yard. The one we use as the NHIG example...

SN: Is it called a fleur de lis or something? You know the curl of the iron work and it's all splayed into like a flower?

HG: Well, possibly....

SN: What's it called?

HG: Waterleaf possibly? I don't know. Anyway...you've seen....

SN: Anyway, you can see the difference really, really easily on the...

HG: Yeah.

SN: I mean it's all completely been smudged the first time around. I mean it looks like it's been smashed with a sledge hammer.

HG: Yeah. No sweetness of line, it's all been done with the wrong techniques, it's all been done in the wrong materials. Because it was paid for by the parliamentary works directory.

KL: So this time they don't go to tender...

HG: And it's common. That's common.

KL: Is that just...can they not do that because of the value...

HG: Yeah, they were almost obliged to go to tender but they managed to sneak it...I mean, we didn't rip them off.

KL: No, no, no...it's just...

HG: Y'know, 'e did a good job...

KL: ...it's just unusual for something not to go to tender.

HG: ...an, and, and, the point is that in order to acquire good work, they had to, they felt that they had to do that. They couldn't...they had to break the rules.

KL: Mmmm

HG: Y'know, that's not good enough. That's no system, is it? Y'know you're talking precious objects here. You're talking about stuff that's, y'know, priceless national heirlooms, and err...

KL: But the other thing is, in terms of cost, it may end up being least cost over a 60 year period.

HG: It will be, yeah...

KL: Because...

HG: Good work is cheaper than bad work.

KL: That's right. That's what I mean, yeah. It might not seem it initially, but over the whole life cycle...

HG: Notwithstanding the damage that's been done to the original fabric.

KL: Mmmm

HG: Y'know, which in conservation terms has to have a value doesn't it?

KL: Yeah, yeah. So it is, even if they want to focus on the finance, they could perhaps still be a little bit more imaginative, or think y'know, a little bit beyond the kind of immediate cost and think more about the wider consequences perhaps.

HG: Mmmm. Well maybe they should. But it'll have to be a different system to the one that they've got at the moment...

KL: Yeah, yeah. Yes that's right.

SN: Yeah. That's interesting.

HG: Because the worst of it is, because...I mean that's the sort of thing that is driving the prices down.

KL: Mmmm.

HG: Nobody is going to get trained. There is no market place for the skills, of the y'know, the person who wants to do the job properly. The person who wants to train, to make that... That's about 4 days work. Y'know, there's no market place for it. Because always somebody gonna come along and say 'ahhh, I can do that cheaper'. And it won't look the same anyway, but the point is it won't be the same...

KL: Noo...

HG: Y'know, you'll end up doin' it again in 10 years time. By which time the skills'll be long gone.

KL: So, is there a real concern then about sustaining these skills in the sort of medium term do you think?

HG: Yeah. There's no market place. I mean you can get trained at, there's...people say to me 'ooh there's a skills shortage'. There's no skills shortage. There's a huge number of very, very keen young people out there who want to do it. What there is, is there's an order shortage. Y'know, the ground is not fertile at the moment. Y'know, there's nowhere to...y'know...in order to learn that, somebody's going to have to work at it, diligently, for 5 years. Minimum. And that's a very, very erm bright, y'know...that's a big investment in your time. To learn skills which are not then marketable.

KL: Mmmm. So do you think erm, you said the public sector, the work 'ad dried up...I mean do you think the public sector perhaps could play a bigger role in creating the demand that would allow...

HG: Well it's who owns the material isn't it. If you're talking about restoration work...

KL: ...mmm

HG: I mean an awful lot of it's owned by local authorities. Isn't it? Well that's dried up completely. There's no, no, no, you know, no local authorities' are spending money on parks anymore. Erm, there will be one or two HLF funded ones I suppose...

KL: Uh huh...

HG: Erm, y'know, people like parliamentary works, but they're a bit exceptional because they have a huge security budget, and err some of what we get to do is done on that. Y'know, done on the back a that budget. Erm, National Trust are broke. They....English Heritage are broke.

KL: Mmm.

HG: Y'know, there's been a noticeable decline in err y'know, publicly owned erm refurbishment in the last 3 or 4 years. We certainly...well Dorothea went out of business a month ago...

SN: Oh really?

HG: And they were...part of it I think was the fact that they err, were very much specialists in refurbishment and didn't do much new work.

SN: In what work? Museums?

HG: Err refurbishment work, yeah.

SN: Right, OK.

HG: And museum work, yeah. They were rather depending on that kind of thing coming in.

SN: Right

HG: Not that they...it was their parent company that went down in actual fact, but there again, Linfords...

SN: Oh Linfords yeah. Did Linfords own Dorothea?

HG: Yeah.

KL: Oh right.

HG And they were specialists in refurbishment work themselves, so I rather suspect that Linfords themselves were in financial trouble because of the downturn in all the jobs for refurbishment of buildings, y'know.

KL: So is a lot of what you're doing at the moment what you'd call 'new work' then?

HG: Yeah. We've moved onto new work really. We still do refurb, we're getting the Piece Hall gates from Halifax in...

SN: Are you?

HG: ...next week.

KL: Oh really, oh right. Wow.

SN: Oh that's good.

HG: So we still...y'know, we do it when we can get it.

SN: That's council isn't it.

HG: That's council.

SN: Did you have to tender for that?

HG: We did.

SN: But it had a good specification?

HG: I wrote it.

SN: Right.

HG: No, they did it properly.

SN: Uh huh

HG: They commissioned a report, proper report. And err, so I got to write the spec..

SN: They did learn a lesson though didn't they, with some ironwork in a church in Halifax.

HG: There are some railings...yeah...I think I know the ones you mean...

SN: I think they learnt from that.

HG: Yeah, well yeah. Right. But I've seen the railings and I thought they were pretty crap, but I didn't think anybody else would notice.

SN: I think that they noticed.

HG: Hahaha, right. Oh well. That's good.

KL: So you, you put in for that. And there would've been competition for that job then?

HG: What Piece Hall?

KL: Yeah, yeah.

HG: Yeah, there'd've been competition for it.

KL: So do you feel you've got many competitors? Genuine competitors in terms of quality?

HG: Well we 'aven't got Dorothea anymore, which is a, which is a big blow really to be honest. Erm, a lot of the other people who are on the tender lists are just not...just can't hack it as regards to work. Y'know, they're not craftspeople basically.

KL: Right.

HG: They're still tendering against us, but it tends to be rather cheaper, so we lose an awful lot to people who... erm, y'know, we wouldn't rate.

KL: Uh huh.

HG: As err, certainly wouldn't invest in training or anything. They don't actually have any of blacksmiths of their own anyway a lot of them.

KL: Uh huh.

HG: They just put it out to, y'know, anybody they can find who'll do it for them. Who's usually a one man band. Soon there won't be any training involved there.

KL: Uh huh. It sounds obviously as if you, errr, the kind of range where you work is obviously national.

HG: Yeah.

KL: Do you do any err international?

HG: Not really. No, no. Very seldom do we get anything abroad.

KL: Mmmm.

HG: We sell materials of course, sometimes.

KL: Right.

HG: We don't do work over, overseas. Guernsey and places like that. We've worked in, but it's not really overseas is it? It is actually over the sea, but...

KL: Yeah, yeah...

HG: Ireland, we've done a bit of work in Ireland. Now and again.

KL: Uh huh.

SN: When you say sell materials, what do you mean?

HG: Well we sell material. That's part of our business is selling wrought iron.

SN: Uh huh.

HG: Making and selling wrought iron.

SN: Is that done here as well?

HG: Yeah. I'll give you the guided tour.

SN: I've never been here before. I've only ever been to Kirby Debdale.

HG: Oh, OK. Well I'll give you the guided tour. If you like, if you've got the time.

SN: Yeah, that'd be good. We'd appreciate it. But...can you tell who your legitimate competitors are, by whether or not they're buying wrought iron from you?

HG: Erm, yes. It's a very good barometer of who's good and who's not good, yeah. We can...err...yeah. It very often happens that we will get a tender through, and it will say...it will specify the materials that we supply.

SN: Right.

HG: Erm, and if we don't get any other enquiries...I mean you'd only do it with a big job where there'd be a good parcel of material. If we don't get any other enquiries for that material, we very often ring them up and say 'look, don't mean to be erm difficult, but we haven't...you haven't got anybody else quoting in this material'. Cos they couldn't possibly quote in it without coming to us. I mean that is just an accident of fate to be honest, and of course I get a lot of stick for that...

SN: Yeah.

HG: But it's not my fault that I'm the only person...

KL: So you're the only person...

HG: Yeah.

KL: In the UK...

HG: In the world.

KL: In the world?

HG: Yeah. Now that's not my fault. I'm accused of havin' a monopoly, but...

KL: Well yeah...

HG: ...it's a material that's been around for 7,000 years, so I'm not err, I'm not responsible if nobody else makes it.

SN: Mmmm.

KL: Is that because there isn't sufficient demand for somebody else to make it?

HG: It's because standards 'ave fallen. Y'know, people no longer insist on decent material.

KL: So, you, you've satisfied the...

HG: The very small demand that there is

KL: ...that there is? Whether or not...

HG: We have actually, we 'ave actually created the demand.

KL: Right OK.

HG: Which also annoys the hell out of some of the other people out...in the business.

KL: Right.

SN: Because there are other ways of doing aren't there, that, that might...

HG: Yeah, you can use other materials....

SN: Like, you could use cast elements?

HG: Well it's not really, no it's errr....that's...the answer is yes you can use cast elements, but it's not the same technology and it's not the same, if you're talking in terms of craft skill, it's not the same craft skill.

SN: Right.

HG: In fact it isn't really a craft skill, isn't casting. *muffled*

SN: You can use mild steel as well?

HG: You can use other materials, and most people, before we came along with the, y'know, kind of resurgence of wrought iron, and everybody was using steel, yeah.

SN: But that does damage doesn't it? Over time?

HG: It's a high maintenance liability. Yeah, but there are ways round it. People are doing very, very good work in steel.

We would claim erm, that it's not an appropriate material to use for heritage work.

SN: But until you have those principles...

KL: Mmmm.

SN: That's what National Heritage Ironwork Group does...

HG: No, no, National Heritage Ironwork Group are staying well away from the materials debate.

SN: Oh really?

HG: Well, else people'll say 'it's just a way of sellin' wrought iron isn't it?'

SN: Right OK, yeah.

HG: So I just say, 'no, absolutely no mention of materials, use what the hell you like'. It's craft skills we're talkin' about here.

SN: Right.

HG: I mean, there aren't that many craft skills which are specific to the material.

SN: Uh huh.

HG: I mean that, is made a steel.

SN: Right.

HG: And I defy anybody to tell the difference in the craft skill between makin' that and...in fact that's more difficult. It's a more difficult material to use for these traditional craft skills.

SN: Right.

HG: So...y'know, so we're just staying well away from the materials debate.

SN: But for the conservation debate...

HG: Well, conservation professionals make up their own mind.

SN: Yeah. OK.

HG: Y'know, if you're askin' me what I think of wrought iron, as a wrought iron manufacturer obviously I'm going to tell it's good stuff aren't I? You can make your own mind up. I'm quite happy to prove it. But, when we're talkin' about conservation craft training, I've gotto distance myself from the material debate.

SN: Ermm, and am I right in thinking that you mill....when you produce wrought iron, you're milling old wrought iron aren't you? You're recycling it?

HG: Yeah.

SN: Where do you get it all from?

HG: I'll show you. I'll show you when we've finished here.

SN: Ok,. Ok. It's an unusually sort of material isn't it? We've asked other people where they get their materials from to try and...

HG: Oh the job that's in the workshop at the moment is entirely made of steel.

SN: Where's that from?

HG: Steel stockholders over there.

SN: Oh OK...

KL: On this site?

HG: Sorry?

KL: People on this site?

HG: Yeah.

KL: Oh Right

HG: Um...the world of....craft blacksmithing could manage perfectly well without wrought iron thank you very much. You can do as good work in steel as you can in iron, as far as craft skill is concerned, the materials debate is a bit of a red herring.

SN: Right.

HG: But, the reason why wrought iron died out it...it's a bit like why that's (*knocks table*) not made of walnut. It's made of something very much cheaper than walnut which actually does the same purpose.

KL: Mmmm.

HG: ...serves the same purpose. It's, it, if you could say 'well, that represents a fall in standards, doesn't it?'. Y'know, the fact that this table isn't made of walnut you could say represents a fall in standards, and it's a similar sort of thing with iron, but representative of that fall in standards is the fact that this table isn't a work of art. This table is made by people who didn't need craft training. Y'know, and that is a part of the same process as, y'know it's cheaper, the material of the table has cheapened, but are the training opportunities and the work opportunities. And it's something that...I mean you're probably familiar with...all craft trades 'ave experienced this after the war. Y'know, all traditional craft trades experienced real cheapening...y'know, use of cement...

SN: Yeah, yeah.

HG: ...as you rightly know.

KL: Mmmm.

HG: Y'know, cast stone as opposed to carved stone.

SN: Breeze block as opposed to brick.

HG: Yeah, yeah. That's right. And generally speaking it can be seen as a decline in standards. And that's exactly what happened to blacksmiths. There is...there was no demand for those skills, y'know, especially when modernism came along and all the rest of it. And the baroque went out of fashion, there's no demand for those skills. Well fair enough, y'know, you could say that's the way life is and just carry on. What about conservation of the baroque though?

SN: Mmmm.

HG: Where are the skills? Where's the market place for training those skills? You've got to do something to sustain that market place. Given the fact that there are people that are willing to do it, and really want to do it. Y'know, very, very happy to train and dedicate their lives to doing that sort of thing. You've got to provide them with the market place do it, i.e funding! Cos it's dearer, y'know, making these pieces here is an awful lot dearer than making stuff that you buy a...y'know, a load a components and weld them together. Or whatever the other standard you might take. So it's all to do with, y'know.... I mean NHIG is a way, for me, of getting prices up. Y'know, it's getting the prices up to a point at which I can afford to employ and train very skilled people.

KL: Uh huh

HG: But, y'know, commercially speaking, as a business, I need to get the prices up. I need to reverse the trend to get the prices down, and that's what the NHIG is about. And people say, 'ooh, you've just got a commercial interest in

this'. Absolutely dead bloody right. How the hell am I supposed to survive if I haven't? But the thing is it'll benefit everybody else as well.

SN: Yeah, there'll be other benefits. Conservation benefits, and benefits for people that want to train.

HG: Yeah. The fact that I'm gonna benefit from it, *muffled* at the moment, *muffled* working out that way, is incidental.

OK so that's my motivation for doing it. Didn't mean to say it didn't need doing did it?

SN: Mmmm.

HG: Y'know everybody's got to have a motivation for what they do.

SN: Erm, I had one other question but I can't remember what it is now....

HG: Oh, I'm impressed that you 'aven't got a list!

KL: Haha!

SN: Really? Haha. I have it's imprinted... But no I think.... Have you got any other?

KL: I think that's...we've done training, materials, competition, tendering...I think that's probably more or less all our topics really. Isn't it?

SN: Yeah, yeah.

HG: tendering is alright, provided the people on the tender list are all on a par.

KL: Yes, yeah, yeah.

HG: And that they have proved themselves in some way so that the commissioner of the work is happy with whoever gets the job. That's not the way it works.

KL: And is that true of all sectors, would you say...doing the tendering, y'know? Whether it's National Trust, or public sector or a private client...

HG: Yeah, I don't see that there should be any difference. No, I don't...

KL: It seems to be the same problem throughout.

HG: Yeah. No, I err, it's less of a problem with private individuals.

KL: Right. Because they don't obviously have to go to the tendering process.

HG: well they're not obliged to. They very often do...

KL: I suppose, yeah...

HG: ...y'know, we're working for Russian oligarchs who, y'know, and their main contractor is going through a tendering process.

KL: You are doing that did you say? Or are you throwing that in as an example?

HG: We are working for Russian oligarchs...

KL: Oh right.

HG: ...and we have had to...well in that particular case we didn't. But in the past we have had to win the work on a tender basis.

KL: Mmmm.

HG: You know, and in one particular case in point ummm, y'know, I got so upset when I saw the drawings and the specification, that I actually went down to the architect's office and said 'you don't want what you've drawn. What you want is good work, this is crap'.

KL: Mmm.

HG: Y'know. And we got the job. On the basis of my stinkin' letter. I did know the guy actually, so I could kinda get away with it. But...y'know...

KL: Mmm.

HG: I said 'look, if you go for least cost on this you're gonna end with something that is a, y'know, you don't want. You're just not gonna want it. What you've ordered, you don't want it. You've got to be able to pay more'. And so we got the job even though we weren't the cheapest, but even so we didn't make any money on the job. Y'know, under those circumstances it's not possible to make a profit, if you can't make a profit you can't afford to train people.

KL: Mmmm

HG: So it's all very, very self-destructive is the whole process.

KL: Mmmm. The ar...the architect is something that we've found has kept cropping up...the role of the architect.

HG: Mmm.

KL: And I spose it hadn't struck me before, y'know, how much the architect in a way is a generalist. Y'know, what we're now finding is that all the people that have got the specialisms are saying 'well they don't know enough about our particular part of the whole requirement'.

HG: No.

KL: Erm...

HG: No. And there is a, a tremendous lack of specialist training for those architects. I mean we did the CPD last year didn't we, and we got 10 conservation professionals who were very, very happy to come and learn. They all...all of them knew that they didn't know.

KL: Mmm.

HG: And they went away after 3 days knowing a bit.

KL: Right, so this is, is a sort of an ongoing training, after they've qualified. But, were they architects?

HG: Some of them were.

KL: Right. That elect to come along because...

HG: Yeah.

KL: ...they think it would be useful. Mmm. And that's part of a CPD, so that would be recognised by the profession then?

HG: Yeah.

KL: Oh that's, interesting.

SN: Yeah, part of the continuing professional development.

KL: Yeah.

SN: It's...there's so much to know isn't there...? Do you know what...about each different material?

HG: Well, yeah but you can get help. Y'know...it's a case of when people know when people know that they need help.

KL: Yes, yeah.

HG: I mean that one up there was, it's actually all 3 pictures there, err, was err Chelsea Royal Hospital, which was designed by Quinlan Terry. And erm, no doubt you know who Quinlan Terry is...

KL: I don't I'm afraid...

HG: Well it's Prince Charles's architect. He's one of the very top conservation...well not conservation...classical architects. They don't do conservation work, they do new work in the style of...

KL: Right.

HG: Hence they're much criticised of course. By the modernists out there. Err, and we got the drawing through, for the building with the gates shown on it. And err kind of a drawing of the gates, upon which we were supposed to price. And, it, it's a very awkward moment but you have to pick the phone up and you have to say, to Quinlan Terry, who is y'know, like super posh, err we can do better than that. Which is effectively criticizing his design, isn't it?

KL: Yes, yeah.

HG: And in his case, he said 'let's see what you can do'. And so we got to redesign it.

SN: So you redesigned it?

HG: Yeah. So it's actually Sally's design not mine. And, y'know, and everybody's very happy as a result. So it is possible for people to go to...y'know, for architects, having encountered a problem with their design, but we had to point out to them that they had a problem with their design. Y'know, and they subsequently admitted 'well architects can't really design ironwork'.

KL: Mmm.

HG: But a lot of them don't know that they can't design ironwork. They think they can, then there's the arrogant...y'know, I'm the bloody architect thing as well. Which tends to not help. But y'know, there are....I suppose really it needs...what I'm saying is, is that should be recognised as a specialist area. Y'know, just as you wouldn't design the central heating system. You'd get somebody else in to do it, wouldn't you? Y'know. Well that should be recognised as a specialist area.

KL: So, so that particular design you're talking about, erm, was it just that you felt that it couldn't be done with the materials? Or aesthetically it wasn't....

HG: No, no. Anything can be done... I mean if they had...

KL: Or there just wasn't enough detail to it?

HG: Well...

KL: What was the kind of problem with it?

HG: It wasn't, it wasn't within the kind of design ethos of the medium. Now I'm talking about, y'know, it is a specialist area and ironwork designs are ironwork designs. There not adapted woodwork designs, or it's just a bit like some stonework you might've seen somewhere.

KL: Mmm.

HG: They're actually ironwork designs, and you need a specialist in order to make the most of that medium.

KL: Uh huh.

HG: We felt we could do better than...I mean, yeah, we could've gone and made what they said. And, another blacksmith would've done.

KL: I'm just curious...going back right to the beginning y'know, you were talking about, you need people that've got intelligence and problem solving skills...

HG: Mmmm.

KL: Are you sort of introducing another...this sort of design aspect as well?

HG: Yeah, well it's all to do with being a specialist isn't it, in your own chosen medium. Y'know, you do need other people to recognise that you are a specialist and to come to you for help. And be prepared to pay for that help. I mean let's not beat about the bush, if we're going to do a design for that, we'd say 'well it's gonna cost you £1,500 to design this y'know. So not only 'ave you told the bloke that 'is design is crap, you're gonna tell 'im that you're gonna charge 'im for the, for redesigning it y'know. But there is always...it's well worth it. Y'know, everybody's extremely happy with what's...y'know the end result is.

SN: Is it just about taking the material to....y'know getting the most out of the material, or is also about fitting in with the design of the building as well?

HG: Yes, it's, it's to do with all of those things. Yep. I mean for a start there's an idiom. If you're talking about erm, effectively what is a replica, I mean it's a replica of a style isn't it?

SN: Uh huh.

HG: You've got to be familiar with the techniques which went...because the techniques that you use in blacksmithing work tremendously affect the design. In fact you could say that the design of wrought ironwork is entirely a product of the characteristics of the materials, and the jointing methods and that sort of thing. So if you wanna produce convincing period ironwork you've got to be familiar with all of those techniques. So that's to say you've got to be a metal worker, or have extensive experience of metalwork, in order to be able...y'know, to be comfortable...

SN: Right.

HG: Err, I mean yes, yes you've got to have a sense of proportion and yes you've got to have a sense of design in that it's gonna fit into a setting somewhere.

KL: And do you expect all that to reside in one person that works for you? Or could a team of people come up with the same...

HG: No, no, no. We...in our, our...if you were a one man band, which most of 'em are, then the answer wuld have to be yes wouldn't it? I mean in this particular instance no, because we do design work in the office and the guys in the

workshop make it. But, I mean, very often I'll say, say to them 'there's the drawing, I want it a bit like that. You know how to make ironwork...'

KL: Uh huh

HG: '...as long as it's beautiful I'll be happy'. Very often I actually say that to them in the workshop, and they really respond to that.

KL: Mmm

SN: So they kind of finalise the design?

HG: Yeah. 'You sort it out, you sort the detail out'.

SN: Mmmm. Well that means that if you ever do retire, then somebody else...

HG: Seems inevitable one day...

SN: Well yeah. When you retire, then there are people that can move into what you do?

HG: That's exactly right, yeah.

SN: So they getting opportunity to train...do you know what I mean? You say that you don't train people at base level, but people to get the opportunity to move up all the time and learn about everything in the business all the time?

HG: Yeah. Yeah, I hope so. I hope that the people on the shop floor are improving. It's at a cost, there are certain techniques which I insist that they use, which are not the cheapest techniques. Y'know, there are far more direct ways of getting there. But I'll very often run into trouble with my business partner about that, because he'll say 'I thought we were supposed to makin' money out of this job..'. I'll say

'Yeah, but gotta give people the practice. Because if they're not gonna practice these methods, they're not gonna be able to use them. You know you've gotta resist that. That's what's happened in every other working....y'know, what's the cheapest way of doin' it?

SN: Mmmm.

HG: OK, well we'll get a profile cut. So immediately you've got one element of craftsmanship that's disappeared from your work. And it's a downwards spiral, it's happening right across society, y'know. Farmers who used to have an idyllic lifestyle now sit in cabs, tractor cabs on their own all day. Y'know, and as a result their the biggest...the biggest number of suicides is among farmers.

KL: Yeah.

HG: That's supposed to be progress? And it's all to do with the fact that there's a cheaper way of doin' it. Well y'know, bollocks to that, we're not in it for the money, we're in it for the experience. We're in for, you know...people very often say to me, y'know, when we get into an argument, they say 'ohh, right, so, you want me to pay so that your blacksmiths can have fun'. I say

'Absolutely dead right. What's wrong with fun? In any case you'll get a better job that way'.

KL: That's probably a good place to err...

SN: Yeah. Good place to end..

KL: To stop I think.

SN: Thank you very much Herb.

Dennis Cobb, Firm09Ro. Date unrecorded

SN: Right, well, we're recording now.

DC: OK.

SN: So...it doesn't mean...you don't have to, you can still like make jokes and stuff.

KL: Hahaha.

SN: Erm, but I just wanted to kind of open things, because of my interest in training and how people [train] within small companies and gain craft skills, how you gained your skills, and how the people the work in the company came to be skilled in the way that they're skilled.

DC: Right, OK. I mean if you go back a good few years, to your first question, how did I gain my skills. I did a formal apprenticeship, erm, started in '69, which was then a 3 year apprenticeship. The 7 year apprenticeship 'ad been phased out prior to that.

SN: Uh huh

DC: Um, and that was working with people who were tradesmen, who's skills had been picked up sometimes formally, some informally. But all of them were, y'know, reasonable men who's all got a set a standards, in those days, if you think back to the late '60s, all the guys who were at workin' age had either done national service or had seen active service.

SN: Right, yeah

DC: So they all 'ad a different totally different set of standards and values to what people do now. Erm, for instance, they'd polish their boots every day. Just one little thing. Now, that doesn't happen. They would bring a reasonable pack up, and a Thermos flask, from home because A) it was cheaper, and B) they knew what they were getting'. Now half the guys don't bring a thing, and they'll got the shop and spend far more money that what they need to. So, it's completely different method of society I suppose. And different education system. All the guys then were literate and numerate. I mean we have problems with some young people of literacy and numeracy when they come into the industry, and I know ConstructionSkills when they're doing the, doing the introduction for some of them, y'know they give them some additional training, and sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't work. But that, that, that's a big problem. The material that you have to work with. And again years ago, for trainin', for us getting' apprenticeships and people to come into the industry, we used to go along to the schools, to the secondary schools generally, and we'd say to the careers masters quite simply, 'do you 'ave any lads who don't want to stay on at school, and want to come into, into construction?'. So we'd go along as a collective, the construction industry, and they'd say

'yeah, there's 5'. So you'd work with them. But now, they're very protective. They won't even let you into the schools because it's bums on seats. It's teachers' job, so they want to keep these people in education longer, for whatever reason, erm rather than comin' out and learnin' a trade. I still think some of them would be better off getting out on site and learning, erm...but there in lies another problem, because the whole industry's changed. When I first started scaffold was a rarity. I mean we 'ad a 9 yard wooden pole ladder that you put up on a building and stripped a roof.

There was no scaffold. Now it's completely turned the other way, and for the better in some ways, where we don't do a job without a scaffold basically. Erm, but the other problem that we've got, is that if we're employing young people, i.e. people under 18 years of old, we've gotta do a young person's risk assessment.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: So we're doing risk assessments and method statements on every job, that are different for the two groups. So we generally tend take trainees on, apprentices, when they've attained the age of 18.

SN: Really.

DC: Mmmm.

SN: Do they have A levels, or?

DC: No, generally not. Erm, the two that we took on last year, one had been in the industry workin' informally as a trainee for a year and half, two years. With a leadworker, a local leadworker, who's a good guy. But, y'know, didn't have the facility to put any formal training in place.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: Erm, and the other guy, he was at 6th form college doing something which he didn't really want to do, and decided one day that 'I don't wanna do this anymore, I want to do what my dad did'. Which was leadwork. So he's come along. Both of them are, are on a 3 year heritage specialist apprenticeship programme. Those 2 guys. Down at the Lead Training Academy in East Peckham. And both doing incredibly well. I mean 1 guy's got, I think it was 8 sections of marking, and I think 'e's got 7 As and 1 B.

SN: Right.

DC: And he's the older of the 2, the more experienced one. But even the youngest guy, who's got little experience so far, erm, I think 'e's got 6 Bs and 1 C.

SN: And how do you recruit them? Do you...

DC: Word of mouth really.

SN: Just word of mouth.

DC: Err, one of them actually came to us, cos he'd heard on the grapevine that one a the trainees that we'd had before, we had to err, part company with, because he'd started doing recreational things which didn't really err agree our company profile, shall we say.

SN: Right.

DC: So, he lost his chance. Missed his chance. And we took somebody else on. We also 'ave 2 slaters and tilers. One of 'em's just done 'is NVQ level 2, on OSAT. And Jason Elliot did that for us, who you'll know.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: And the other one, who's a bit younger, he's doing the same thing as well, but it'll take him a little bit longer cos he's not as old and not as experienced.

SN: Why OSAT?

DC: Because it serves us at the moment. We'd rather have the heritage special apprenticeship programme, but there's none in the area. We can't get enough people, would you believe, in Yorkshire and the Northeast, to sign up to it.

SN: No I know.

DC: Which is a real shame, and despite Jason's efforts and my efforts, through whichever route we take, even through it's...the Independent Training Group, or through CSkills, or through NFRC, or through Leeds College of Building. We haven't managed.

SN: So is it the level 3 that they've done? The heritage qual?

DC: No it's just the level 2...

SN: Plain level 2?

DC: Plain level 2, yeah.

SN: Right.

DC: But, erm, the plan is when they've done that to continue with the HSAP, and I'd like to keep continuity with trainers and use Jason for that.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: Cos I know 'im, I know the level of training, I know the way he thinks.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: Just...completes the circle as far as I'm concerned.

SN: Right OK.

DC: I know what's being delivered and how it's being delivered.

SN: So, you've got...would you say you've got 4 trainees then at the moment?

DC: Yeah, generally, yeah.

SN: And erm, how many people in the company totally.

DC: Twenty...I think we're at 25.

SN: And...

DC: Including staff

SN: And how many office staff?

DC: Jane and Rob are full time, 1, 2, 3, 4 full time, and 1 part time.

SN: So you've probably got about 20, 21 crafts...?

DC: Craft and general, yeah.

SN: And of those people, are they, are they all apprenticeship trained?

DC: Erm, majority yeah. Or, either they're apprentice trained, or they've done NVQs.

SN: Right. OK

DC: To some degrees. And even the Polish guys we've got, they've done up to NVQ2.

SN: Right OK.

DC: We, we struggle to get them any further.

SN: Uh huh. Why is that?

DC: Language mainly.

SN: Right OK.

KL: How Polish do you employ?

DC: We have 5, 6, 7, 8... We've got 9.

SN: Wow.

DC: Yeah. And out of that 9, 7 have done the...been with us 6 years.

SN: Why do you think you've got such a high proportion. Are they better work...

DC: Erm, they're keener to work. And they will work 6 days a week, cos they're here to work, and they're here to earn money. And they'll work from, in the summer, from 7 til 6.

KL: Are they from the local area? Is that where they're sort of...

DC: No, we recruited them from Poland initially.

KL: Oh right, actually went...

SN: Really?

DC: Mmmm, and then, with some of the other ones it's word of mouth.

SN: Right.

DC: Y'know, 'I 'ave a brother... I 'ave a friend'. And it works quite well with the English guys. We've not found that there's any, any dissent.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: Ermmm, maybe there was at first. But, they all work together so there's kind of a symbiosis between them, and they'll...the English guys maybe leave at 4.30, they say 'oh well, if you're staying on another hour and a half, can you just do this and get it up to there, and tomorrow we'll do this'.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: So it works quite well.

SN: Do they tend to work in pairs then, so you have...

DC: Erm, yeah, 2s or 3s. Or, on the bigger jobs, like at Bootham, once we've got all the scaffold up we'll probably 'ave about 15 men there I would 'ave thought.

SN: Really.

DC: Yeah.

SN: Right, OK.

DC: Yeah, co we've got a short programme time and varying trades, we've joinery, stainless steel, leadwork, slating, insulation, fire protection, lightening protection.

SN: And do you do all of that in-house, or do you...

DC: Everything but the lightening protection....

SN: Really.

DC: ...which we'll sub out, yeah.

SN: So do you have like a, a specified joiner, or is it just that your roofing guys have got skills in other areas?

DC: Oh. We've got a couple a guys, again, Polish guys, who've got very good joinery skills.

SN: Right OK.

DC: Mmm.

SN: That's interesting.

DC: Yeah. It's difficult to map their skills...I mean there is the organisation, I think it's NARIC...

SN: Right.

DC: I don't know if you've across them. Who can map skills that people 'ave obtained in different countries and transfer them, but it's exceedingly expensive.

SN: Oh really?

DC: Yeah.

SN: Right.

DC: So we didn't... We looked at that and then we didn't bother, and thought we'd start from first base.

SN: Which is the level 2.

DC: Which is the level 2, plus all the other things like asbestos awareness, raising wheels, plasma, erm, and so it goes on. First aid, and all the other little things that we have to do.

SN: At heights?

DC: Working at heights. Unfortunately we can't do working at heights touch screen health and safety test with the Polish guys because there's no Polish translation for that.

SN: Really?!

DC: No. And, I've asked CSkills, I've asked Pro-metric who run it for them, and....yeah, here we are.

SN: OK

DC: But all the English guys do at least the working at heights.

KL: So does that restrict what they can do then?

DC: No it doesn't. But it just, it just gives us a little bit more credibility with insurers.

KL: Right.

DC: Because we work at heights, therefore the guys are trained basically in the basic working at heights test.

SN: OK.

DC: It would be very helpful if CSkills forced Pro-metric to provide the workin' at heights health and safety test. Cos they're all capable of doing it.

SN: And you would've thought it wouldn't be that difficult thing to do to get it translated would you?

DC: It's not a difficult thing to do. I mean we've, we've translated ourselves in-house usin', erm, the daughter of one of the guys who works for us. The training manual for *muffled* single-ply. Which is a 5-day course, 5-day residential

course. So if we can translate that, a little regional roofing company, I'm sure that the might of CSkills and Pro-metric can if somebody can be bothered to do it... So...

SN: OK. We were gonna ask you a bit about the work that you actually do, and obviously we'll talk a bit about heritage. But are you solely involved with heritage buildings, or do you work on new build and other types of buildings as well...

DC: We do some new build, erm, but not a lot.

SN: Right.

DC: I think last year, value-wise, we probably did quite a lot of new-building cos we did quite a few for East Yorkshire that were, solar photo-voltaic in them. So that in itself is quite expensive. So I think each dwelling was something like about £8,500. So we probably did 50 of those last year I think.

SN: Right.

KL: When you say East Yorkshire, who...

DC: East Riding of Yorkshire County Council.

KL: The council.

DC: Yeah, these were affordable homes. And they were built to a particular specification so they could obtain the grants from central government.

KL: Right.

DC: Which I think was something that came out of the last government. And they'd got approval prior to the change at Westminster. There's been some at...2 sites at Goole, 1 at Market Weighton, 1 at Cliff, err, 2 at Cliff.

KL: So presumably you had to compete for that work?

DC: Yeah, yeah, that was competitive tendering, yeah.

KL So obviously you succeeded in that...

DC: Yes.

KL: ...even though that's not really your main avenue of work, which is quite interesting.

DC: Yeah, erm a lot of people shied away from it because a lot of them aren't solar trained. We've...we're trained on about 5 or 6 different solar systems.

KL: Right. So that was a key... factor then?

DC: Yeah, yeah. And a lot of people f...at the time that that work was procured, a lot of people were still ditherin' about, well 'shall we, shan't we, will we won't we'.

KL: Mmmm.

DC: And the other element is, it's an expensive umm avenue to finance, because with photovoltaic panels, you have to buy them upfront. There's no credit facilities.

KL: Oh really? These are the big things that are appearing a lot on... roofs at the moment.

DC: That's right. We tend not to do the overlay systems, we'll do it when we either re-roof or a new roof.

KL: Right.

DC: So we'll do erm, something like the solar century systems, which is... excuse me

Phone call interruption

DC: So they substitute say 3 concrete interlocking tiles, for a panel of 3 photovoltaics.

KL: Mmm.

SN: And have you seen that, sort of side of your business really grow, in the last however many years?

DC: Errr, very slowly. I...we looked into it about 5 years ago and thought it would take off then. Quite quickl. But it really didn't, and I think some of it was a bit of reticence on my part...getting involved with people who didn't really know how to integrate them in with the general construction.

SN: What do you mean, the designers?

DC: Yeah. The designers and the contractors.

SN: Right.

DC: Whereas now it's become the norm. And there was a time when it was very difficult to get hold of some of the ancillary products like inverters, erm, the panels produce 12 volt DC, so the inverter changes that from DC direct current 12 volt, to 240 volt alternating current to go into the, into the grid. And that was because Germany, which was the biggest photovoltaic market in the world, were changing their feed in tariff, like's just happened in this country. So people were rushing to get installations put in for the higher feed in tariff, so suddenly inverters were on 6 months delivery at the time.

SN: OK. And, where do you get those?

DC: Erm, a lot a them are made in Japan, or China.

SN: But would you buy them direct from Japan and China?

DC: No.

SN: You buy them from a...

DC: We buy them from a reseller.

SN: So would it be like a Yorkshire based supplier...

DC: We partner with a company over in Lancashire.

SN: Oh OK.

DC: And err, yeah, they sell us the packages.

KL: But you say you have pay upfront for them?

DC: Yeah. On delivery, yeah. Or before delivery.

KL: And why....is that just cos it's so new, or...?

DC: I think it's because it's very new and that's the way the market's been geared up, and it's very sensible. I mean if I was a supplier of anything I'd try and get paid upfront, especially in this market.

SN: Mmm.

DC: And I think that because they were dealing with people in construction, where companies don't have a particularly good record of paying on time, that's the way it developed.

KL: W...I suppose, I suppose for more established suppliers you've already got a pattern haven't you?

DC: Yeah we have.

KL: Cos this is new, they can dictate the terms as they want I spose.

DC: Yeah, yeah. I mean we can, now that the market's settled down a bit since the feed-in tariff's been reduced, we can, if we purchase some of the panels through one of our regular merchants, we can get some credit terms.

KL: Mmm. But you'll have built up a history....

DC: Yeah.

KL: ...with them?

DC: Yeah. Some of the merchants we'll do over 100,000 a year with, we pay them every month and they like us so they're confident, and...and they'll do that.

SN: What about other materials...things like y'know, slates and lead sheet...

DC: Err, lead's not been a problem, it's just the price of it.

SN: Uh huh

DC: Stainless hasn't been a problem this year. Copper's not been a problem.

SN: Is it all from the local area, from in Yorkshire.

DC: Errr, lead we'll either buy from Calder, which is Lancashire, or we'll buy from ALM, first gated lead mills, who are a bit further south. South of the midlands somewhere..

SN: OK

DC: Can't quite remember where. They have, they also have another company which is associated, in South Yorkshire somewhere. Near Barnsley.

SN: Right OK

DC: So, and as for sand-cast lead, we'll use somebody in Peterborough who cast that for us.

SN: So you use that a lot?

DC: We've used quite a lot this year, yeah. This last year.

SN: On churches?

DC: Churches and historic buildings, yeah.

SN: Old buildings.

DC: Mmm, yeah. I think we did erm yeah Wetwang Church, that was all sand cast. Flixtondale church, there was an aisle we there, that was all sand cast. And erm, something up at err a stately home just outside Tadcaster.

SN: Oh OK.

DC: Small roof on a tower. That was sand cast.

SN: And so there you're just replacing what was...the original aren't you?

DC: Exactly, yeah. But putting it back to modern standards.

SN: Right, so you can get sand cast lead but in a...

DC: Well, well we'll reduce the bay sizes and we'll fix it in a compliant way with lead sheet association guidelines.

SN: Oh OK.

DC: So you've always got a bit of detail changing

SN: Right OK. I hadn't realised.

DC: Mmm.

SN: What about things like your slates and stone slates particularly?

DC: Err new stone slates are a huge problem.

SN: Yeah.

DC: There's one supplier who is not reliable. Err, and we've had immense trouble with.

SN: When you say not reliable, do you mean just not on time, or...

DC: Yeah, 'e doesn't produce. 'E'll say 'e'll produce and 'e doesn't produce. And that's Ladycross quarry, which is err up in the northeast there, back of beyond.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: And err, no, so I don't ever want to deal with him again thank you very much.

SN: Oh really?

DC: Mmm.

SN: So when you do have a stone slate roof, do you do reclaim or do you have to turn a job down, or...

DC: No, we'll do reclaim, we'll offer reclaim. And providing we can, with English Heritage for instance, providing we can tell them where the sources of the make-up for the shortages are, they seem quite happy.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: And, I think, we did Wighill Church last year, and the slate for that came from a building at Pudsey that was being demolished.

SN: Right OK.

DC: So that didn't come too far.

SN: Not too far away is it?

DC: No.

KL: So you're always on the err, y'know looking out for...

DC: Oh goodness me yeah. At the moment we're struggling to get erm y'know reclaimed Welsh slate. Really are struggling to get it, and the prices are just going...

KL: And is it quite competitive...y'know, is there a lot of people after...

DC: Yeah, it is. It is.

KL: ...it out there presumably.

DC: And a lot a the people that you, that offer the materials are general dealers shall we say.

KL: Mmmm.

DC: So you've got to try and deal with somebody that you've got a bit a history with, cos sometimes you wonder where the slate came from.

SN: Right. So even Welsh slate isn't quarried anymore?

DC: It is yeah, they've shut down Ffestiniog quarries.

SN: Yeah, we (to KL) heard that didn't we?

KL: Yes, I can't remember who from, but somebody told us that yeah.

DC: Yeah.. But yes we can get Penrhyn, reasonably easily. And the quarry, since MacAlpine's sold it on after all their troubles with it... Don't know if you heard about all of that?

SN: No.

DC: No, there was fraud, a lot of fraud went on.

KL: Right.

SN: At Penrhyn?

DC: Penrhyn, yeah. People selling it out a the back door I think.

SN: Right.

DC: So it's just called Welsh slate now.

SN: And it's in new ownership?

DC: Yeah. I don't quite know what the make-up of the company is, but err, they're a bit more accommodating, whereas before they were very rigid. So they will make you certain size slates. Whereas before it was y'know, they reduced the number of sizes they cut after they quarried them.

SN: OK.

DC: So now, if we give them plenty of notice we can say we want something which is a non-standard, non regular slate.

SN: And they'll do it in any size basically, as long they've got the notice?

DC: Well....as long as they've got the notice, and providing that, that seam that they're in at the moment will produce that size slate.

SN: Uh huh

DC: And that colour slate as well.

SN: Right. Well, yeah. And what about clay tiles?

DC: Not a problem.

SN: No?

DC: And we tend to use those from Doxhill, Sandtoft.

SN: Uh huh

DC: Just in Humberside there. Erm, the one that we use most is a Doxhill greenwood

SN: Right.

DC: ...which is traditionally made, which is an extruded tile through a brassed eye.

SN: Oh I see, I think I know what you mean.

DC: Yeah. So they'll weather naturally.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: Rather than the machine made ones which are...they're almost vitrified and don't seem to weather.

SN: No. But it is the same clay isn't it?

DC: Same clay, yeah.

SN: I think they dry...

DC: But the, the greenwoods, they're all handmade. And once they've extruded the tile and put it in an open drying shed..

SN: Yeah...

DC: Then they'll fire it...

SN: They do have a different finish as well, don't they?

DC: They do. It's a very rough open finish, yeah.

SN: Yeah.

DC: With the err, with the machine made ones, they...clay's made into erm more of slurry and it's pressed, and then it goes through a tunnel kiln.

SN: Oh OK.

DC: And the greenwoods, I don't know what sorta kiln they use, but they used to use y'know, big static kilns.

SN: I think, I think it's still the same. I think they kiln differently, they kiln them at a lower temperature don't they?

DC: Mmmm.

SN: So they dry more slowly...

DC: Yeah, yeah. They're a good quality tile but you're payin' the price for them.

SN: Mmm. Yeah. And, I don't know, you said that you tend to work more on heritage buildings, and I just wondered, is there a reason for that? Like, have you chosen to specialise in that area and...

DC: Personally I hate doin' new build.

SN: OK.

DC: I don't enjoy it at all. Erm, there's no challenge in it particularly. You're orderin' product codes rather than err, trying to get hold of the traditional material.

SN: Uh huh

DC: Erm, it's more competitive...

KL: Which is more competitive? The...

DC: The new build.

KL: Right, yeah.

DC: Lots of, lots of companies operate a business model which is volume...erm, so they'll go on low margins on volume. And they'll rely on doing volume with the manufactures to get a rebate at the end of the year. And that's a big part of their operating profit.

KL: Right.

SN: OK.

DC: Whereas with us, it's skill and expertise and a bit of good luck.

SN: Ha ha. And do you find that err, maybe your clients are sensitive to that? That it's not just about volume and...

DC: Yes, yeah. Plus a lot of the clients prefer the way we work. Erm, a, a, a lot of the jobs that you get involved with now are heavily controlled by the contract as such, and we tend to use the contract with certain clients, certain architects that we know, that we're dealing with. Say it's a PCC with an architect, and then it's us acting as principal contractor, it just gives us a lot more scope to be sensitive towards everybody's needs. So if there's something in the scheme which, we feel should've been included, we'll probably just do it rather than charge extra.

SN: OK.

DC: And equally, if we've got a delay on the job cos, say the sand casters are busy, we can't get lead for a couple of weeks, and if we overrun the programme it tends to be, err, accepted without giving us a penalty.

SN: And that's because of relationships...

DC: Relationships, yeah.

KL: ...More give and take...

DC: Yeah. I mean, typically at the moment, Wighill Church, they want us to go back and put smart water on because their insurers 'ave said they must 'ave it. Their roof access hatch onto the tower is blowing off, and neither of those things are in the specification, and we just said look 'we'll go back and do it'.

SN: Right.

DC: Because we have a relationship with them, they have a relationship with us. They know the PCC, we know the church.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: And...

SN: Was...is there any public funding there? Like English Heritage funding, or...

DC: That one was the first one that we did that had some funding from WREN.

SN: Oh really?

DC: Yeah.

SN: Right. The recycling people?

DC: Yeah. So that was quite a learning curve.

SN: The landfill?

DC: Yeah, yeah. That was quite a learning curve for us, because we had to....they only paid for certain elements of the work, so as those elements were completed on a monthly valuation, we had to value that separately and invoice it without the VAT cos WREN don't pay VAT.

SN: Right.

DC: And then the churches that we did last year, err, I think there's 5 we did. All of them had problems because of English Heritage retrospectively deciding not to cover the VAT. So all of them 'ave got shortfalls in funding.

SN: Right OK.

DC: So instead of getting the whole of the VAT back through listed places of worship scheme, they've only got an element of it back.

SN: Right. I didn't know that. It's interesting.

DC: So we've got one of the churches really struggling to pay us.

KL: So did the rules change, or...?

DC: Yeah they did, and they did retrospectively. Rather than saying from this day forth there will be...

KL: Right OK, yeah. But was that a gov...y'know, an HMRC ruling?

DC: No., no.

KL: An English Heritage rule...

DC: English Heritage.

SN: Not DCMS?

DC: Erm, I think it was English Heritage.

KL: What's DCMS?

SN: Department of Culture, Media...

KL: Oh right, OK.

DC: I think it was English Heritage, so... I know, if you want more background on that Caleb Hamilton'd be very good.

SN: OK, I like Caleb.

DC: Cos he's err made representations to English Heritage about it, and...

SN: OK.

DC: ...and err, I mean one of the churches in particular, I don't think he's been paid any fee yet and we've been paid our first valuation, part of our second, but we 'aven't got the rest. And it leaves us in a predicament because you don't want to start proceedings against a PCC.

SN: No. No, I can imagine.

DC: And, for them, it's quite a fraught time. Because the people aren't generally used to dealing with contracts as such. And erm, y'know, they feel really bad about not paying us.

KL: Yeah, yes, that's really unfair isn't it?

SN: Wh, what your sort of describing is that you have this kind of, I don't know if congenial is the right word, but y'know friendly partnership working environments...

DC: Yeah. We're sensitive to the needs of err...

SN: In a case like that...

DC: ...various people.

SN: ...where you know one partner has retrospectively changed the rules, it's kind of affected everybody really badly.

DC: Yeah. And the worst thing is we're not talking about a vast amount of money.

SN: No

DC: Through Yorkshire and Humberside it's under, y'know, it's under £1million. And it's VAT for goodness sake. It's not real money if you like. They probably get it back.

SN: Hmm

KL: That's right, yes...it doesn't make any obvious....

DC: It doesn't make any sense to me.

KL: ..and to do it retrospectively is the harsh aspect in particular isn't it?

DC: That's right. Cos all these PCC's 'ave done all the funding streams, y'know they've done the coffee mornings, they've done the bits of legacy, they've gone out to the wealthy landowner and said, 'please, will you give us £10,000 to make our shortfall?'

KL: Mmmm.

SN: It's difficult isn't it?

DC: And then if you've got 20% VAT say on a £160,000 for instance, £32,000...

KL: ...yeah...

DC: And you're only getting half or less than half of that back.

SN: Yeah, that's.... so...oh sorry...

KL: was just gonna say, so in the contracts, erm particularly the heritage contracts, do you find that they're really very prescriptive in terms of design and materials? Or do you have quite a bit of say in...

DC: I think the specifications are very descriptive, and often we get involved with, with design early on.

KL: Right.

DC: Erm, an architect'll ring up and say 'can you come along and help us do a, an investigation on a roof'. So we'll open up the roof and see what size the rafters are, the battens are, how the ceilings are attached to the underside a the church for instance.

KL: And at that point are you going along and charging a fee for that advice, or...?

DC: We do.

KL: Yeah.

DC: We do, yeah. We'll charge for puttin' up a tower scaffold, and we'll charge a nominal amount for labour.

KL: Right, yeah

SN: And that is presumably...is that, does that come...the architect pays you for that, and bills the...

DC: Yes. And bills the PCC eventually.

SN: Right OK.

KL: So, so, to that extent you can influence to an extent, or you've got some knowledge of what the work is going to be in advance.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

KL: Err, and perhaps can influence what...

DC: A lot a the time the architect just wants somebody to, you know, put a hole in the roof so they can see what's going on underneath. And supply the safe access.

KL: Right, OK. Uh huh.

DC: And they have the things that we don't have. We don't have professional indemnity insurance, so we can't go along and say 'err, this is how you do it'. We can suggest...

KL: Right OK, yeah.

DC: So we'll just invoice, erm, sayin' 'providing access to carry out roof investigation, on such and such a date...'.
KL: Right.

DC: '...at the agreed rate of...blah'. So we won't actually say that we've done any design as such.

KL: OK.

DC: Cos there is a very grey area there with insurance.

KL: Oh right. So would you do it informally then?

DC: Yeah.

KL: Or is it to risky?

DC: No, we'd do it informally, but erm, we wouldn't actually say 'this is the design set in stone'. Or sometimes we'll go along if they've no money, and we'll suggest a specification. And the architect will write that specification. It's not us whose written it.

KL: And do you find the architects, y'know, require or rely on that kind of advice from sort of specialists like yourself?

DC: Yeah they do, they do. They'll have a team of people who they'll speak to.

KL: And do you tend to find that...I think you might've said this earlier, so apologies, but you deal quite a lot with the same architects? Or, does it depend perhaps on the nature of the work, or the location.

DC: We'll, we'll deal with the same architect often, yeah.

KL: So you can build up a relationship...

DC: Yeah. Or same practice.

KL: Yeah. OK, uh huh. And what about competition in the area? Do you feel that there is quite a lot of competition in this...? Well perhaps I should ask first of all how...we've been asking people haven't we, sort of how far would you travel to work? Y'know, what kind of distances do you...?

DC: We tend to stick to Yorkshire and the northeast. We tend not to go too far northeast because that's very competitive up there.

KL: Right.

DC: Labour rates are much lower, so the guys who are employing local labour will be able to do the job at a lower cost. Sometimes.

KL: Right.

DC: But, I spose this year we've worked...basically we'll work anywhere if it's for a regular client.

SN: Oh right.

DC: Or somebody that we know. We've done a couple of jobs in London this year, and err Nottingham, Retford. A lot on the east coast.

KL: Were these people that you knew, tht 'ave kind of moved away, or.... How come you've clients at that distance?

DC: It's management teams who you know, or individuals who've moved through companies.

KL: Right, right.

DC: Or they will be organisations. That do this, that and the other.

KL: And so what about the competition in the kind of Yorkshire area then? I mean, because you've got this kind of heritage side...Does that give you..?

DC: It's, it's certainly there. It doesn't give us carte blanche to charge what we like at all. So we'll, y'know, we'll be lucky or we'll be unlucky.

SN: Is there anybody else do you think that specialises so much in heritage as you? Or do you think the other companies tend to crossover between heritage and...

DC: Yeah, they'll cross over I think. And, there's a lot of troubles really when, this current recession, although we've not felt the teeth of it, and hopefully won't, erm, when their traditional markets have changed, they went into the heritage market, and they were, some of the prices that they were picking the work up for were ridiculous.

SN: Really.

DC: So we just backed off and left them to it, and there was some horrors. That happened.

SN: And when horrors do happen...how, y'know, how does it happen? Is there not enough, y'know with the architect, and the client...?

DC: It tends to be in the plannin' process where the problems occur. So it's a bit like anything that you two will do. I mean if you put a lot of time into planning, you'll find that the operation goes pretty smoothly. And it's the same with us. If we plan an operation as best we can, and heritage work is probably the hardest in some ways, because there are imponderables. Erm, we did a church this year at Watton, erm, the architect 'ad had a specialist timber company doing a report, and identified the ends of two trusses that were rotten. And once we'd opened it up, it was all the ends of all the trusses that were rotten. So, I think that was about another £28,000 to put that work right. So nobody was happy. The architect wasn't happy, the PCC weren't happy...

SN: No.

KL: So the heritage work is still erm going quite well, despite the, sort of recent...

DC: ...as far as we're concerned, yeah.

KL: I'm quite surprised really. I'd've thought that might be an area y'know contracted as quickly, certainly.

DC: It just depends on the funding, and I mean, Bootham Park for instance. That's all grade II up there.

SN: And who's the client there?

DC: That's the PCC, the current PCC.

SN: Right.

DC: Err, which changes on the 5th of April.

SN: Really, the boundaries?

DC: Well, Leeds Health Care Trust or whatever their specific title is take it over. And that's just the err mental health side.

SN: And at the moment it's owned by the church?

DC: No, at the moment it's another health care trust.

SN: Ohhh, OK I see.

DC: But their funding stream will come from central government. They have this funding, gotta spend it before the trust changes over.

KL: So what's, what's the...it's a grade II listed building but it's just run as offices is it? For the health...

DC: No it's mental health...the one that we're doin' at the moment, it's erm, elderly assessment unit.

KL: Oh right, right.

DC: So they d exactly what they say. And the other ward is erm a secure ward.

KL: Right.

DC: So it's people with serious mental health issues.

KL: But it's just the actual organisation that's changing, what's going on and the building carries...

DC: Mmm, yeah...

KL: ..right...

DC: And probably 7/8 of the building is heated to the extent that this office was when I walked in, and unused.

KL: Really?

DC: Ahh, yeah, yeah.

KL: Right, so that's public sector...

DC: That's public sector...funding from there's nothing to do with English Heritage. It's purely through central government and the health care trust.

KL: Uh huh.

DC: And nothing to do with York District Hospital, which I think is York Primary Health Care Trust or something like that.

SN: Mmmm. And you won that competitively.

DC: Yes. Yeah. We'd done the first phase there, and I know they'd got 2 or 3 prices there.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: And I think the second phases was more erm what we do it for. Now whether they went out to tender on that I don't know.

SN: Right.

KL: So did you have t put a full...

DC: We put in a bid in, yeah.

KL: Yeah, OK.

DC: But we used the same rates on that as we did on the last one.

SN: Right. And are you, for that project are you contracted directly to the client, or is there a main contractor?

DC: No we're through Mansells, which is part of Balfour Beatty.

SN: OK

DC: Who are....the company's fine, they pay very well.

SN: Uh huh

DC: And we know the management team. So we know the senior project manager, and the senior regional area manager. So it works quite well.

SN: And, are there many other small companies like you on site?

DC: Mmm...we're vir...we're doing everything apart from the decorating.

SN: Oh really.

DC: Mmmm.

SN: Oh so there's no masonry work...

DC: No, not at the moment. Unless they find any.

SN: Right, OK. OK. So Mansells themselves haven't got any people on site?

DC: No no, they're just managing it, yeah.

SN: Right.

KL: How...but you're...you sound fairly content with, with that.

DC: Yeah, I don't mind. That's the way the world works sometimes.

KL: Right.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: Mansells've got a 5 year term contract with the various health care trusts, or probably North Yorkshire.

SN: Mmm.

DC: To do various things. So we've done quite a lot with them over the last 3 years.

SN: On healthcare?

DC: On healthcare, yeah.

SN: So it's sort of a framework contract maybe for...

DC: Yeah, I think it is something like that.

SN: Right, that's interesting.

DC: So we've done bits at Richardtown, bits and Scarborough, err, *muffled* Park. Erm, there's one at Clifton Park, we put a tender in but that's dithering about at the moment for planners, and bat surveys, and....

KL: So really, once you've kind of got some work with them, you've done a presumably good job...

DC: Mmm

KL: Then is it, sort of does it feel easier then to sort of, keep getting' more work...

DC: It does. We have a relationship, you'll find, they'll ring you up and say, cos a lot of them'll be design and build...

KL: Yeah

DC: Erm, 'and this is what we have to do. Can you recommend something that will comply with that?'

SN: Right. And do you have to tender for each job?

DC: Yeah.

SN: You do?

DC: Yeah.

SN: Even though they've tendered already?

DC: Yeah.

SN: Right.

KL: But presumably they might come and ask you, at least y'know, you're sort of first on the list kind of thing, to sort of say 'will you put in tender?'

DC: Yeah. Or if they really want us to do something, they'll say 'well can we do it on another basis?'. So you'll, you'll do open book tendering, where you'll say 'right', you'll agree percentages for, for erm overhead, profit, preliminaries, blah, blah, blah. So we just go along and do the work, and it'll be time costed as we go along.

KL: Oh right, ok.

DC: Which, is OK. But it's, it's a lot of management.

KL: And do, fdo they give you...do you have much warning really of how much work they might require of you?

DC: No...

KL: I'm just thinking of tying it in with other jobs that you're doing.

DC: No. It's like this job at Bootham Park. It was, err, the funding came along I think first week in November, and we were told we could start the next week.

KL: Mmm. I thought juggling was quite a....

DC: Oh yeah..

KL: ..I mean could be, the most difficult, or one of the most difficult tasks...

DC: ..yeah...so we started...

KL: Cos obviously, you don't want to put people off or let them down.

DC: No. So we said well 'really we're rammed until Christmas, err, but we did start the next week, and we agreed a phase. But then there's been, a lot of the scaffolding is, it's all temporary roofed. So a lot a design work. So that has to be designed, and the designers got to then agree with another designer, and so it goes on. So that can be a long process. And then of course, the bat, bat mitigation. Various surveys for asbestos...

KL: Mmm

DC: ...and various other things. Bats are a big issue now as you know.

KL: Yes, yeah...

DC: And hold many a project up.

SN: Well that's the reason the wheel didn't go ahead isn't it?

DC: Yeah, in its position at the top of Marygate, but then they just bulldozed it through...

SN: Yeah, that's...that's what I didn't understand.

DC: I didn't understand that either. So that's what I look out of from my living room window.

SN: Oh really?

DC: Yeah.

SN: No way!

DC: No consultation whatsoever. The people in the erm in the flats opposite Westgate, it was just lookin' straight into their rooms.

SN: What the dust?

DC: No the people on the wheel are lookin' straight into the rooms.

SN: Oh right.

DC: I don't know if you've been to see it, or...

KL: It's in the hotel grounds.

DC: ...in the hotel grounds.

KL: Yeah.

DC: So you've got the hotel grounds with the wheel in...

KL: ...hadn't thought of that...

DC: ...then the road, then Westgate...

KL: ...flats opposite...

DC: Yeah.

KL: Yeah. Never thought about that.

DC: And it's a bigger wheel than last time, it's 10m bigger.

KL: I thought it looked bigger. It is actually bigger...

DC: Yeah.

KL: Right. I though it was just, y'know, memory....right.

DC: But it doesn't seem to 'ave many people goin' on it. It might not last that lot...

SN: Maybe their not inspired by the view of other people's living rooms.!

DC: Maybe, yeah.

KL: So, do you erm, work directly for any erm, I'm thinking of sort of public sector bodies in particular, or does it always tend to be through a main contractor...

DC: Yeah, we'll work direct...at the moment we're workin' directly for erm, Retreat Hospital. Another mental health facility.

KL: That's the place near the university isn't it?

DC: It is, yeah.

KL: Yeah. Oh right, yeah.

DC: So we're up there, and we work direct for them. At some point. Part of the work that we're doin' is to a contractor who's doin' some other work, and some of it's direct to them

KL: Right.

DC: Erm...

KL: And do you find that there's any, erm, sort of additional requirements for public sector work, compared to just any other sort a contractors...I'm thinking of things...I mean you've mentioned insurance for example, or risk assessments...

DC: Erm...

KL: ...health and safety, or is it pretty standard across all jobs now.

DC: It's pretty standard. I mean, and every year there's something else. Like Mansells, the 1st of January this year, it's wear eye protection at all times. Before it was, y'know, when you're cutting.

KL: I err went to the dentist yesterday and they had to have eye protection on.

SN: Oh really?

KL: Yeah. Haha.

DC: So for Mansells that's a new enforcement. Erm, and the other thing with health and *muffled*, their head honcho. And the other thing, that doesn't effect us, is flame proof trousers if you're digging trenches.

KL: If you're digging trenches?

SN: In case you hit...?

DC: In case you hit power.

SN: Ohhh.

KL: Goodness.

DC: Mmmm. So if the electricity doesn't kill ya, the trousers on fire will.

SN: Ha!

DC: So, it's just about designing out the risk. That's what it's all about.

KL: And do you deal with a lot of that side of it, or do 'ave you got other people in the office...

DC: Err Adam, who, who err met you. He does a lot of the health and safety.

KL: Right.

DC: But we're all conscious of it. I mean it's a continuous...learning programme.

KL: Uh huh.

DC: And, y'know, every site we go on, it's risk assessment, method statement, explaining the method statement, risk assessment to the guys. And goin' through it. And then you'll find the contractor has their own induction...

SN: Hmmm.

DC: Which vary from, probably half an hour, to I think the record was 5 hours.

SN: 5?!

DC: And that's when you lose the will to live.

SN: Yeah. And then you're goin' on site just half asleep.

DC: 5 hours. Ridiculous.

SN: Yeah, I can imagine.

DC: But as far as we're concerned, we're always lookin' at, y'know, makin' sure we've got all the bells and whistles that everybody needs. And CHAS is a big thing, which is health and safety.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

DC: Err, all guys been carded, CSCS specifically. Erm, various carding for various other things. Asbestos awareness is a big thing. Everybody's not asbestos awareness you can't come on. Erm, heritage skill cards hasn't taken off as good as it shoulda done. The leadwork ones, they've got a bit more teeth now...

SN: They have yeah, they're doin' quite well.

DC: ...have you seen the lead contractor's have agreed on any projects over a certain value now.

SN: I think that's because they got to a certain number, cos Derek Bull really drove it.

DC: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, weel he's pretty passionate is Derek.

SN: Yeah. Well 'e's done a good job there.

DC: Yeah, 'e does. Erm....but because of all the problems with CSkills now, I think there's a big move to move away from CSCS and...

SN: Is there?

DC: Produce own cards. And NFRC are lookin' at in-house cardin'.

SN: Oh really?

DC: Mmmm.

SN: Right. That'll be interesting to see where that goes.

DC: Yeah, yeah it would. Err, watch this space on that one.

SN: Must be quite early days for that.

DC: Yeah, it is. But NFRC actually are involved in 70% of roof coverings in the UK.

SN: Mmm.

DC: So we've got a lot a teeth. We've got over 1,000 members now. With that amount of coverage, you know, central government listen to us.

SN: Mmmm I can imagine.

DC: And we always get 100% of members who will send their accident reportin' forms back for instance. Which is....that's 4 years running. This year I'm sure will be another year where we get everybody...reporting on that.

SN: Mmm.

DC: Erm, I don't know what else is important really. Yeah, just, the trade associations 'ave got a lot a teeth. We find NFRC is very good, Lead Contractors is excellent. For a very small organisation with only 85 members, it's got a lot a clout. It's very well recognised.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: And the training through the associated organisation, the lead lead trainin' academy is second to none.

SN: Really?

DC: Mmm. That's why we send the guys, our guys down to East Peckham at great expense. You've gotta train them down there, accommodate them and err, feed them. And for the heritage specialist apprenticeship programme, over 3 years, and it's 6 1 week residencies each year.

SN: In Peckham?

DC: Yeah, in East Peckham, yeah.

SN: Is that in London or is it on the south coast?

DC: No it's in Kent, near Tunbridge Wells, that way out...

SN: Oh OK.

DC: Yeah.

SN: Ok. I didn't think it was in London.... And then we were talking about all the kind of rigorousness of health and safety standards on site...

DC: Mmm.

SN: Do you find that differs on smaller sites, or conservation sites...say?

DC: Yes it does differ. Erm, For instance the site that we're at the moment, the Retreat, where we're workin' through a main contractor, err, they make the right noises. But, the site manager doesn't wear his hard hat.

SN: Oh really?

DC: Yeah. And he doesn't enforce it with the other guys, so...they get lazy.

SN: Mmm.

DC: So we get them off there and we get them on another site, and you'll find that they've got into bad ways.

SN: Mmm.

DC: So you're havin' to re-educate them. And they'll say 'well Gary didn't make us wear our hard hats on that site, why do we have to wear them on this one?'

'Different sit, you should've worn them. You should know better, you've been trained'.

SN: Mmm.

DC: And they you've got to go through the err collectively responsibility of health and safety blah, blah, blah.

SN: OK.

DC: And the smaller sites sometimes are quite dangerous.

SN: Like private work?

DC: Yeah. Some of them are. And I think statistically, there's more accidents happen on the smaller sites than they do on the larger sites.

SN: Oh really.

DC: Mmm.

SN: Oh right.

DC: There's more injuries.

SN: OK. And so, erm, you're sayin' that you feel like the heritage work, or your work, has kept up the recession, touch wood..

DC: Yep

SN: I just wondering about sort of the make up of your client base. Is it skewed towards public sector, or big organisations, or private? Or is it split evenly...?

DC: I think domestic's probably about 10%, and I would think private's probably about 30, 35%

SN: Uh huh

DC: Private, non-domestic.

SN: OK, so like commercial.

DC: And then you go to things like ecclesiastical and listed buildings that are not dwellings, that'll be about 30%, something like that. Although last year it did, did distort it a little bit, doing the high value housing with the photovoltaics on.

SN: Mmm.

DC: But that, that won't happen this year. And erm, and then the rest is other bits. Y'know it's...we do very little repairs because we find those very hard to manage.

SN: Why?

DC: Cos they take so much input. You still gotta do a risk assessment, method statement and meet the guys on site, and go through the job.

SN: Mmm.

DC: Make sure everything's err....safe and they can only be there half a day.

SN: Oh, it's to small. So most of your work is reroofing..?

DC: Yeah, yeah.

SN: And when you're reroofing, do you try to use tiles erm that are still usable?

DC: Yeah, I mean the, the, the general thing with reroofing is that we'll take off the roof and reclaim anything that's of, y'know, good quality, and make good with reclaim to match.

SN: Uh huh

DC: That's the general rule of thumb.

SN: Right, OK. And when it comes to things like diminishing courses...

DC: Mmmm

SN: How do you, how do you put those back? Do you, do you photograph them, or...

DC: We photograph them and measure them.

SN: Mmm.

DC: So with slates, err... 'round the back there's pallets, pallets a slates we just sort them out in sizes and take them to site.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: So we'll know that we want...the guys'll say 'right we want a pallet of 27 inch Westminster Dale,' or whatever...

SN: Uh huh, OK.

DC: And then when it's raining, we'll get them in here and we'll sort inside the warehouse.

SN: Right. And erm, fixings, things like fixings, do you tend to use stainless steel?

DC: Erm, stainless steel a lot...

SN: ...do you ever get required to do copper?

DC: Yeah. Copper slate nails, that'll be the bulk a that. And copper nails for leadwork.

SN: Right. And with say, your domestic work....

DC: Mmm

SN: And the private clients, even in they're, well whether or not they're listed buildings, do, do they ever require lead? Or do they tend to go for like a different option? Maybe something more like the stainless steel?

DC: Yeah, they'll require lead. But often we'll go back if it's been vulnerable and been stolen, and put something an else on.

SN: But cost is not normally an issue.

DC: Sometimes.

SN: Sometimes.

DC: Sometimes, yeah. We 'ad a guy down Bishopthorpe Road 2 years ago, and 'e wanted a lead roof. And it was a single storey lead roof, and he had it stolen.

SN: Oh no.

DC: And he travelled away quite a lot, and he just said 'look, it's what I wanted but not any more, because if I'm away, I'll be thinking somebody's taken my roof off, and my house is flooded'. So we put single ply on that.

SN: Is that a listed building?

DC: No. It was a new build.

SN: And why did 'e want lead then, why was 'e so...

DC: Just liked lead.

SN: Oh. It does look nice.

DC: Yeah, yeah it does. Yeah, so that was quite sad.

SN: Yeah.

DC: Erm, and churches, we've probably put stainless steel back on churches where its been stolen on low-level roofs say.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: I think we did a couple last year. And there's more of that'll happen.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

SN: Specially when they're not moved so much.

DC: Yeah. Hutton Bushall we did just before Christmas, up near Scarborough. They 'ad their porch stolen, and they stole the rainwater goods as well. Cast iron rain water goods. Which cost us about £2,000 to 'ave replicated. Just 2 full pipes.

SN: Really?

DC: Mmm.

SN: Where do you go to for those?

DC: Err, that was Longbottoms.

SN: Was it?

DC: Yeah.

SN: OK. Does anybody ever try and put in sort of security devices to prevent?

DC: Yeah, every church we've done this last year, we've put alarms on.

SN: Oh right

DC: Apart from 1, which is a stainless steel roof. And the PCC decided that the level of cover that insurers would give was erm, adequate. But they were insured with NFU, rather than Ecclesiastical. I think Ecclesiastical 'ave taken such a big hit...

SN: Mmmm.

DC: ...and, I suppose if you think about it, NFU, if look at their risk, it's spread over a much broader range. So they'll insure farmers with their plan, they'll insure farm buildings...anything that's their sorta natural thing. NFU'll then...ll go into ecclesiastical, but I suppose their risk element over the whole of their portfolio'll be much less. Ecclesiastical 'ave taken such a big hit cos've what they do...what their core business is.

SN: Mmmm. Yeah.

DC: So I think they've been more stringent. Hence us havin' to go back and put smart water on the 1 church that's had stainless put back on instead of lead.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: And that's Eccles...Ecclesiastical insure that.

SN: Right. And then, I mean, quite a lot of the people that we've spoken to 'ave found that the National Trust is a core client. Would you say that's true (to KL)?

KL: Mmmm

SN: And I was wondering if you do any work with the National Trust?

DC: Yeah we do work with National Trust, but we haven't done much for the last, since they reorganized really.

SN: Right so that's like...

DC: Which is about 3 years ago I think.

SN: Oh really? I think they're still organising aren't they?

DC: Ohhh, they've spent millions on management consultants, closed certain offices...

KL: It's made a difference to who....

DC: Yeah, people are spread too thin...

KL: ...can decide on spend...?

DC: ...I mean...

KL: Oh OK.

DC: The senior building surveyor for this area Craig Barratt, I don't know if you know Craig...

SN: Mmm, I do yeah....

DC: ...erm, I think his area was from, I think Lindisfarne down to Sheffield down to somethin' like that. How ridiculous.

SN: Everywhere east of the M6 was it? The M1, the M1.

DC: Ohhh, just crazy. Absolutely crazy.

SN: Huge. Yeah.

DC: Because the management consultants decided that the area was too small that 'e was lookin' after. But again, they're management consultants. They don't look at y'know what, what he has to do. He can spend all day at 1 property.

SN: Mmm.

DC: And just look at 1 element of work that's needed.

SN: So that's....and with the National Trust to you tend to....do you have to tender for the National Trust work?

DC: Yeah.

SN: You do.

DC: Yeah. We've just got 1 to do for them at Hull, which is Maister House at Hull.

SN: I've heard of it. Craig told me about it actually.

DC: Yeah. That's one that the Trust rent off to Gelder and Kitchen, an architects.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: And it's got a listed ceiling...

SN: It's the staircase isn't it?

DC: ...above the stairway...

SN: The staircase is meant to be amazing...

DC: Yeah...

SN: But that's it?!

DC: That's it!

SN: And now the roof, obviously.

DC: We we put err, I think the lead roof got nicked about 6 or 7 years ago, for the 1st time... So we put it back, and because they were paranoid about the ceiling being damaged any more we actually put GRP under the lead.

SN: OK.

DC: ...so that when it was nicked again, it didn't leak in.

SN: And so it's been nicked again now?

DC: Nicked again, yeah. So we've just got an order for...doing more work up there.

SN: Right.

DC: But it's like, 4 floors up. And they risk life and limb goin' up there to get it.

SN: Must be incredible, mustn't they, climbers.

DC: I don't know....it's beyond me. There's one in Hull, which was a church spire, and it was...a tall tower with a steep spire on it, and a very small parapet gutter 'round it. Only about this high. And they shimmy up the drain pipe about 50 foot.

SN: 50 foot?!!

DC: Got on the, on the parapet, and they'd ripped all the copper sheet off that they could, and threw it down, and...it's crazy.

SN: It's madness isn't it?

DC: Mmm. Market Weighton, they did the Anglican church and the Catholic church. And the Catholic church they came back to on the successive weekend. Took the copper. It's opposite the fire station.

SN: It's just so...brash, isn't it...

DC: Yeah. It's cray. They actually caught them did the police, red handed, somebody saw them and reported them and the police came, they 'ad the car outside with the boot with lead in, and one of them... The copper said 'OK right, what's goin' on 'ere lads?'. And one of them admitted to it, and 'e got a caution there and then. And the other one said

'oh no, nothing to do with me'. And that went to, to erm, to caught. And I think 'e got some community service. So there is no deterrent.

SN: No. Not for a caution.

KL: No.

DC: No. But hopefully this erm government initiative that they've got with any scrap that's weighed in and only gets paid in in traceably money like a cheque or a bank transfer. Hopefully that will work.

SN: That's a new thing isn't it?

DC: Yeah. They've put it on the web 'bout October time, but I think the consultation period's about 6 months.

SN: Mmmm

DC: So there's still plenty of time for people to log on and register their support for it. Why they have to do that, and don't just use their sense and say 'this is it' and legislate immediately, I don't know. I think their...it's too fairer a society that we...live in. Where everybody's opinion counts.

SN: Haha...well prisoners aren't allowed to vote are they.

DC: Errr, not ye, but there's a big move.

SN: Erm...kind of...companies in different craft disciplines that you, I don't know, meet on site...

DC: Yeah...

SN: ...and I know it's difficult cos of the logistics, and I don't know you might be on at a different time... I just wondered how, I mean you clearly have quite a good working relationship with lots of the big contractors that operate in the area...

DC: Yeah.

SN: And I just wondered if you I don't, you know, used to seeing other companies of a similar size on site like you are? Different...y'know, like stonemasons and...

DC: Yeah, stonemasons tend to be smaller companies...

SN: Mmmm...smaller than you definitely...

DC: I mean if you take, if you take Fred or Voussoir Stone...

SN: ...more like 10...?

DC: Yeah, he's got some more guys 'as Fred now. An, who else do we see? Firm3SM. Glaziers, they tend to be numerically smaller. Y'know Bill Myles and Helen Cole.

SN: Don't know Helen actually. But I know Siddon and Jones, and they're small aren't they?

DC: Yeah, Siddon and Jones, yeah. Bill Myles started at Siddons and I think Helen did as well.

SN: Yeah, I think, I think Bill Myles was their first ever apprentice or something...

DC: Yeah I think 'e was yeah. And there's Lewis Short, but Lewis just works on 'is own and he specialises mainly in doin', erm, Georgian fan lights.

SN: Oh right...

KL: That specialist?

SN: Has he not got the patent for that or something...

DC: Oh I don't know.

KL: OH that might make a difference then...

SN: He's got, some sort of...if it's the same person...

DC: Yeah...

SN: I think they've got some sort of patent.

DC: And, erm, Adrian Bell, you know Adrian won't you?

SN: I know the name...

DC: Erm, and then other people who'll do things like ironwork, they tend to be your smaller specialists.

SN: Yeah.

DC: Erm, yeah. But if we do work for a principal contractor, we tend to find we're farmin' out the stonework, and we'll farm out maybe lighten protection. Probably the rest of it we'll just about do.

SN: OK.

DC: Or the brickwork...There's a church at Watton we're doing, there's some fantastic brickwork up there, and we used a company, small company that we work with. Ollie Knight.

SN: Right OK.

DC: I don't know if you know Ollie?

SN: No, I've never heard of him.

DC: Ollie's brilliant. Brilliant bricklayer, and he's got a young apprentice as well, who's brilliant.

SN: And it's just the two of them?

DC: Err, 'e's got 's son as well. There's 1, 2, I think there's 4 of them. That's is.

SN: Right. And they're in Watton?

DC: No, err, Strensall they work from.

SN: They work at Strensall.

DC: Out of Strensall. But 'e did Watton church for us, which was...

SN: I see

DC: ...reclaimed bricks, and err new replicated bricks from Bulmer brick and tile company.

SN: Right.

DC: In Sussex

SN: Right, OK. Well that's interesting. I don't think I've got any more kind of burning questions...

KL: Just a couple, one which I think is really more you question than mine...

SN: Oh dear, I missed it...

KL: You talked about, you like the heritage work because it was challenging...

DC: Mmmm

KL: And I just wondered erm, whether you felt the rest of the people you employ have that kind of same outlook, or... y'know, does it not matter whether they feel the same way as you or not? Definite culture...

DC: Oh it does, it matters a lot, and erm, y'know it's certainly, we certainly 'ave great debates on site about how we think this should be done and...and especially the changeover from, with leadwork. About doing compliant leadwork to how the leaadwork was done in the past. Why 'as it failed? It's because it was too large a piece, or a joint wasn't in correctly, or somebody's done a repair and fixed it down to tight so it can't move. So there's all that debate. And we're often lookin' at, y'know, lead design. Y'know, in great detail. And there's times when we've 'ad 4 or 5 of us just err deciding which is the best way.

SN: So it's quite motivating in a way?

DC: Yeah it is. It is.

SN: And is the architect involved in that as well or...?

DC: Err, erm...

SN: Not so much?

DC: If 'e needs to be we'll involve 'im, yeah. Especially if it needs additional cost.

SN: Haha.

DC: Yeah. But that's, y'know leadwork's a great point of debate, always on jobs.

SN: OK.

KL: And do you find that's sort of, with kinda new people as well? Or is it really just when people 'ave got a certain amount of experience...

DC: ..certain amount of experience...

KL: ...before they can contribute?

DC: ...and we'll involve the 2 young lads as well.

KL: Uh huh. And is that something you kind of think of when you're taking people on? Are you looking for something that might hint they'd be inclined to that...?

DC: Yeah, we're looking for, for a passion for the job.

KL: Yeah, right.

DC: And it just runs through in everything really. Y'know, how they'll look after their tools, how they'll stand, how they hold themselves, erm. Erm, one of them Wilf, I managed to get a bit of a grant from York Consortium for 'im. £2,000 to help with his trainin'. And he came along with me, and, and there was 6 or 8 people around the table. And 'e, y'know, answered the questions. And at, y'know, 18, 19, that's quite daunting.

SN: Mmmm.

KL: That's interesting.

SN: It is.

KL: Just one other thing really. You've talked about, you would act as a subcontractor to a main contractor, and you'll farm out some work occasionally.

DC: Occasionally.

KL: Have you ever worked more directly in a partnership or as part of a consortium? Or would be interested in anything like that?

DC: Yeah we've gone through the process of partnering, erm, spent a lot of time on 1 particular local organisation. Who I won't mention. I probably spent about 5 days puttin' the partnering agreement together, or our proposals for it...

KL: Right.

DC: And erm, we never heard a thing since.

KL: It just...

DC: It just disappeared. And somebody else had got the job before we even went in. I was just going through the process.

KL: Ahh right.

DC: And it's a bit like when jobs are advertised at the university for instance. They've got to advertise them even though...

KL: Yeah...

DC: Somebody's, somebody's err somebody's earmarked for it.

KL: And was that somebody with different...y'know, in a different area? Or was it somebody in roofing as well? Were you complementary...

DC: Some, somebody in roofing

KL: Oh right OK.

DC: Mmm, yeah.

KL: And was the point of that just to increase capacity of what you might be able to...

DC: I think the point of it was for us to do all the damn work, and for then to take the template that we'd produced and give it to the person who was earmarked for the job beforehand.

KL: But what would drive it...I mean yes, I agree that might've been what they got from it, but what would make them go through that in the first place? Looking for that sort of partnership?

DC: To comply with err dictat from above.

KL: Oh OK. So it was box ticking type...

DC: Mmmm.

KL: Right. So apart from that bad experience...

DC: Very time consuming experience yeah.

KL: So you haven't done anything else, or looking to particularly.

DC: We'll just go along, keep tendering, keep looking out for other jobs. We're changing tack a little bit this year with erm, we rarely do any advertising. We've taken a feature out in the RIBA publication that they've just done. Err, there's a feature on York that Ecclesiastical magazine are doin' this month.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: Taken half a page I think in that. And website we're rebuilding cos it's very poor.

KL: Yes I liked...I had a quick look yesterday. I liked the football team that came up.

DC: Oh right...

KL: Is that new or...well obviously it's in progress. It said 'here's our team, sorry wrong team' or something...

DC: Somebody's interfered with our website.

KL: Oh really?

DC: Mmm. Mmmm.

SN: What like a hacker?

DC: Yeah.

KL: Goodness.

DC: So we're just leavin' it at the moment, completely rebuilding it. It's, it's the way to go. I mean one of the other companies that we operate from here, that installs wood burnin' multi-fuel stoves, we get over 90% of the business from the website on that.

SN: But you don't...not with the roofing at all?

DC: Very little.

SN: Really?

DC: Mmm. So, but it's because it's so poor.

SN: Oh I see.

DC: So we're usin' the same model, the same framework as we designed the stove website for the roofing. And err, yeah, that'll be good.

SN: OK.

KL: Right, so yeah I think that's covered...

DC: So the only thing you 'aven't touched on really Sophie, which I think maybe was of paramount importance is training. Erm...

SN: Well we have talked about training a bit...

DC: Well we have talked about training a bit, but generally our, historically most of our funding was from CSkills.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: But now, because of the changes that they've made, and the lack of funding, erm, y'know, we are really struggling to get adequate funding.

SN: When you say funding, do you mean funding... 'ave they cut the grants?

DC: They've cut the grants, and things like training plan, we'd get £500 every 6 months for when we updated our training plan.

SN: Mmmm

DC: That's gone...

SN: Right.

DC: That was used for... y'know we never make any money out of it. It's just used for covering the cost. So now we've got to produce the training plan ourselves and we don't get anything for it. Yet we've still got to submit it...

SN: In order to get the grants...

DC: In order to get the grants and to say that 'yes, we have a trainin' plan'.

SN: Mmm.

DC: Umm, we don't get money for toolbox talks. I mean, I can understand why that got knocked on the head because it was abused, some a the big companies doin' 2 a week... For every guy on every site. We don't get funding for CSCS touch screen tests anymore.

SN: Right.

DC: There's various bits of fundin' which 'ave been eroded. So there's more now goin' on to the local training group. So, you know the Yorkshire Independent Training Group, that I'm still involved in...

SN: Uh huh.

DC: Erm, y'know, we're tryin' to find different routes of fundin'. And we've found quite a lot of fundin' from European Enhancement Fund...

SN: Uh huh

DC: So that was quite successful... Offerin' free trainin' for various things.

SN: Right that's good.

DC: Erm, so that's been quite successful. So we've thrown a bit a money at that, cos we had some money. Erm, CSkills were tryin' to cut the money that all the trainin' groups 'round the country were receiving...

SN: They don't get much anyway do they?

DC: No. We don't get much. But we fought that, we managed to keep that at the same level. But it's becomin' a real battle.

SN: Mmm.

DC: Err, to be fair they're startin' to stream out a bit more money for various things, but err they seem to be in disarray at the moment.

SN: So, I'm quite interested in the relationship between the independent training group and CSkills, and you, and kind of like the need for both, and what the different roles are.

DC: Yeah. There's huge dissent at the moment, and especially with National Heritage Training Group.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: Erm, y'know, that's just really not worked for 3 or 4 years now...

SN: No.

DC: Insofar as the trainin' groups are concerned, and there's different people pullin' in different directions, and err, people becomin' very frustrated.

SN: Uh huh.

DC: Y'know, there's various e-mails this week, about..there's a meetin' next week, and err, y'know somebody's fired an e-mail off that probably they shouldn't a done. Err, and it's not really the way to deal with, deal with the funders, which are CSkills. Cos they just, then tend to become entrenched and close ranks, and err, you can't have constructive dialogue with them any more.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: But we'll see. Changes are afoot, but whether they...

SN: Definitely for the National Heritage Training Group...

DC: Yeah, whether it'll be for the better or not, I don't know.

SN: I think the problem with the NHTG is, erm, it was the last....now I'm quite new to this, but it was the last erm, it was the last training group that didn't have its own independent status.

DC: Mmmm.

SN: So, am I right in thinking that before now, there were lots of training groups that were sort of part of ConstructionSkills, but gradually they all went independent?

DC: Yeah.

SN: Well, and the NHTG has only just become independent this year, and it's kind of getting used to it's new...

DC: The training groups were forced to become independent, they were forced to become limited companies...

SN: Yeah, apart from the NHTG.

DC: Yeah. Because you couldn't get your funding.

SN: Mmm, oh is that right?

DC: Yeah. So, we had to incorporate with limited liability for the Yorkshire Independent Training Group in order to continue to get funding from Cskills.

SN: Uh huh

DC: So, we did.

SN: And that's what they've had to do now, the NHTG have done...

DC: Yeah.

SN: From, I think they did it last year. And now they are like an independent body...

DC: But equally I supposed its made us got out and look for other funding streams, and we're still looking.

SN: Yeah.

KL: It all sounds quite time consuming.

DC: Yeah, it is. Yeah it can be very frustrating.

SN: How long does it take? How much time do you have to dedicate to the training group?

DC: Oh I don't give a lot now. I'm not chair of that anymore, I'm just on the management team.

SN: And you go to the meetings...

DC: Yeah, we've got a meeting week after next I think. So we've got a full time training officer Carys Smith, you'll know Carys...

SN: Is Carys full time? I didn't realise she was full time...

DC: ...just about. She used to be more part-time that's what she is now anyway. And Carys is great at goin' and ferretin' out things.

SN: Mmmm.

DC: But err, she's not a completer finisher, but she's got some very good skills. Erm, there's another problem with the colleges, cos they're stacked out with trainees. Leeds especially.

SN: Roofing trainees?

DC: Mmmm. So people are thinking 'there's no jobs, so let's go and do some trianing'.

SN: Mmm.

DC: So there's no spaces left.

SN: For apprentices you mean?

DC: Mmmm, yeah. So at Leeds, there's nothing in slating and tiling for instance available.

SN: Really?

DC: No.

SN: Really. That's amazing isn't it? What, even for a part time apprentice?

DC: I don't think there's any such animal as a part time apprentice. I think you sign up to it and....

SN: But they only go to college part time, on block release...

DC: Oh yeah. I don't think they've got any more, more space.

SN: Really. But that means there's lots of people takin' on, cos you 'ave to be an apprentice, you 'ave to employed don't you, at the same time?

DC: Mmm, but they've taken some on that aren't allocated to an employer...

SN: Oh I see, that's like full time.

DC: Yeah.

SN: OK.

DC: Den Houghton who used to train slating and tiling at Leeds, he's left, so there's a bit of a void there now I think.

SN: Right. OK. So do you think it's stopping young people from getting into the industry?

DC: Yeah, I do yeah.

SN: And it's quite a new phenomenon?

DC: Whereas before you'd struggle to fill courses sometimes.

SN: Uh huh. That's partly to do with the sort of the contraction in the construction industry, but also to do with the funding and Cskills. Cos even, you're growing really, or maintaining...

DC: Yeah, we are...

SN: ...a level. Well you have taken 4 trainees on

DC: Yeah. Yeah, we've grown. This year's been a record year for us...

SN: Has it?

DC: ...for record done, turnover. I think we've probably increased by about 30% this year, something like that.

SN: Really.

KL: Definiteley getting close to tea time...

Alan Clark, Firm10SM. January 19th 2012

KL: ...formal introduction.

SN: Yeah. A formal introduction to an informal interview really.

AC: OK.

SN: Erm, well, you know me. Well, first of all I'm gonna start with the date.

AC: Right.

SN: 20th of...

KL: 19th.

AC: It's the 19th.

SN: Is it the 19th? 19th of January 2012, it's Sophie Norton, Kim Loader and Alan Clark. For me PhD I'm looking at the sort of ongoing relationship between conservation practice and, erm, craftspeople and the affect its hand, y'know in relation to sort of...progress in the construction industry, and really tryin' to track that. For the first chapter I'm gonna look at erm sort of chronology of change, so going back to Diderot and what he thought about craftsmanship, and Ruskin...

AC: Right.

SN: Erm...

AC: ...sorry, yeah...

SN: Cos Ruskin worked quite a lot with erm, err people like GG Scott on how to train craftspeople and spent time in Germany looking at these erm, what are they called? They were sort of places on site where German craftspeople could learn how to carve certain things erm, and there's lots of pictures, or some pictures that people have sketched of these sites, and these places of learning in the 19th century.

AC: Sort of lodges in effect on the sites.

SN: Kind of lodges, yeah. And erm then GG Scott tried to do a similar thing here, and it didn't work very well, with the architectural museum...

AC: Right... I didn't know any of that, yeah...

SN: And erm, yeah, yeah. So I'm looking at that and the stuff that Ruskin did, and then I want to kind of forward into the 20th century, erm my first chapter I'm gonna look at Brierley and Anelays, cos Anelay was Brierley's main contractor for most of the work in York that he did in the 20s.

AC: Right.

SN: Erm, and then there's a big archive of work, a big archive of Brierley work at the Borthwick, so I've got access to that obviously. And also I know Duncan Poynter, and they've got, they haven't got a big company archive but they've got stuff that goes back, so I can use some of that. And then for my third, fourth chapter, I'm going to look at current practice...craftsmanship and current practice and how the 2 things relate. And it's really that chapter that I'm working on now with Kim, erm because Kim is from the management department at the university, and works...is really interested in the relationship between the public sector and small and medium sized enterprises. And so we're also

thinking about the sort of wider supply chain and how craft companies sort of function in that context. Err, and how things like training get done or don't get done, and stuff like that!

AC: Right.

SN: So, that's the general idea. Erm, we've started off by asking people really what their experiences are, how they came to be where they are, erm, and just how you came to be the craftsman that you are really.

AC: OK. So you want me to summarise that?

SN: Basically.

AC: Well I did a politics degree at York University.

KL: Oh!

AC: Many years ago. I came out in '82. But at that time, obviously with the recession, at that time, and Thatcherism, I didn't have a job, and I had no real idea what I wanted to do anyway, I'd just gone to university cos I could. Um, and at that time the woman I was with had converted a barn. And so with my numb brain, we started to landscape the gardens and do dry stone walls and that kind of thing, around the barn. And then, after that, local farmers started asking me if I'd repair their dry stone walls and so it went on. And then I started working as a contractor building stone hedges in Cornwall and Devon, and quite a lot, miles of it. But erm...and by that time I'd realised I really loved working with stone. So, but erm, but the weather, and the pay in Cornwall, where you were really treated as a glorified labourer doing that sorta work, made it quite difficult to earn a living, so I then decided to go to college and retrain as a stonemason. Erm, and initially I was registered at the Worshipful Company of Carpenters school in London, but by that time I was with someone else, and they didn't really want me to go to London, and she looked into Weymouth College...

SN: OK.

AC: So at the last minute I got onto the full time course at Weymouth College, doing the 2-year City & Guilds, at the time. So that was it really. And then, at that time, certainly, because that was the culture and still is probably, for the most part of colleges, stonemasonry colleges. They were very down on conservation and conservation was a load of crap, and all this sorta stuff. That was what you received. So you came out of Weymouth College thinking that...

SN: Uh huh.

AC: As most stonemasons still do... But as it turned out, me and a guy wor...then set up together, and 'is father was an architect, and 'e put us forward for a job. And so there was a big job that we did, which was a mixture of stonemasonry and conservation. But then we, we had trained with 2 people are now directors of Nimbus Conservation...

SN: OK.

AC: ...but we'd trained at the same time at Weymouth. And so we wrote to Nimbus and we started working increasingly freelance for Nimbus Conservation, and it's then that I came upon the ideas of conservation. Not so much from the firm, but arch...a surveyor like Del Major for instance, who is very SPAB...and that initially, we were sort of saying 'well, this is a load of crap' and all this sort of stuff, but it increasingly made sense to me. And then, you know, I

started reading William Morris and stuff, and err I fancied myself then and still do as something of a Marxist. So it's quite nice to see a socialist talking about this sort of stuff. And putting it in that kind of socialist context if you like, conservation.

SN: Mmmm.

AC: Which I still very much believe myself, and try as best I can to behave accordingly in the business we do. But, so that all made sense to me. And then, as I say, we worked increasingly for Nimbus, and then my friend and I set up, and we did conservation projects in our own right. And so as time 'as gone on, I've become much more of a building conservator. We then got a very big project on Portland, on the Isle of Portland. A ruin, house that had been ruined for many years. For 100 years it hadn't had a roof on it. Err, and we were the lead stonemasons, conservators on that project. And in the course of that project, it just made me aware that I just didn't know enough about what other people were doing, what the joiners were doing, and other...

SN: Uh huh

AC: So then I went to erm....the MA, I didn't do the MA but the MA course at erm Bournemouth University part time...

SN: OK.

AC: ...to pick up what I felt I lacked. And I wasn't doing...but at that time of course there was only me and one other guy who were actually craftsmen. Everyone else were conservation officers or whatever, who wanted to improve their... So I didn't see it as career move, rather that I just needed to fill in those gaps in my understanding, to some extent.

SN: Uh huh.

AC: Erm, and so I did that. But then was far too busy to do the MA. And during the course of that MA, got involved in quite a major campaign against the ruination of a house in Dorset, which we'd seen through the MA. Erm, and so, I wasn't allowed to do the MA on that, which is what I would've wanted to do it on. For political reasons, so I chose as well as my business not to do it. And then I moved up to York, err...

SN: When was that? When did you move up to York?

AC: About, ooh, 2000. So it was in the middle of that course, so it was quite a big change for me then. We'd sort of...over that period in Dorset, and some say we'd actually developed quite a name for ourselves...but erm, but that's we...we hit against...we didn't actually want to expand terribly, we weren't in it to make loadsa money, and we never did. And still don't actually. So, again for personal reasons I moved up north. Erm...I was...and by that time my friend an I 'ad worked for a year, and we'd continued for another year workin' full time for Nimbus, so they took us in full time. And the reason for that was, in the business we were doin', the cash flow was just such a problem at the size we were, and we were so indebted erm, that it just made sense to go in with Nimbus. However, as, as someone who'd been self employed and quite maverick all my workin' life, I found that really quite difficult workin' for a firm, where I 'ad to make a phone call to order a, anything. Or whatever, you know. And so...and then I, this is...stop me if I go on too long. But the thing probably that changed me the most, or gave me the biggest sort of move, was I then, through the SPAB, they....at the time that I was with Nimbus full time, they had an enquiry from Landmark Trust USA, whether they knew

a stonemason, mason who would go over to America and work with their crew on one of their projects. And train them. So erm, and the SPAB in London recommended me. So then I made the contact with this guy, and we developed this. And, and so I ended up persuading Nimbus to let me go out there for 3 months, which is what I did. And worked with a crew of bricklayers it turned out, in, in Vermont. Erm, and then thereafter, Vermont and America being as they are, people would just sort of, every time...it just went on year on year that someone would say 'oh..'. They'd hear that there was this British stonemason and they wanted you to go and work on their project. So it rolled for about 4 years. Erm, and that first year I was....I got a phone call towards the end a my time...it turned out that the guy who runs the Landmark Trust in the USA is something of a psychopath, and I mean he'd done everyth, he'd been very careful to do all the arrangements verbally, and he'd put nothing in writing. When we got there he was renaging on every agreement.

SN: Oh really?

AC: However, we got through that in the end, erm sort, by the end...once I'd done what I'd said I would do for the period a time I said, I was gonna leave it, and then, and the SPAB were involved, and the Manifold Trust 'ad sponsored me, so at least I had them to go to, and they knew the situation, and so... But just towards the end I got a phone call from an architect, a sculptor actually in New York City saying 'can you come tomorrow, and sort this problem out for us?'. And erm, and so we ended up going a couple a days later down to New York City, and this was the Irish Hunger memorial project, which was dry stone walls and an Irish cottage, which was going badly wrong. Erm, or had gone wrong, the masons had walked off the site, the sculptor, everyone was at each others throats, and they'd heard by this convoluted network that exists in northeast USA that there was a British stonemason in Vermont. And so they phoned me up and demanded I go down. And they paid us an absolute fortune, but, for me it was kind of a life changing experience in the sense that I did go on site, and I did bail it out, and I got everyone working together again in the space of about 5 days, and it made me suddenly wake up to the fact that I actually had some...that I could deliver, I could do that sort of thing. And erm, you go in with a very British attitude...I remember sitting in this meeting with all these architects, and cos it was a major New York City project, multi million dollar project, and, and....am I allowed to swear on this?

SN: Yeah, you can swear!

KL: It's only for us...

AC: *muffled* and I was sat there thinkin' 'well I've got to show that I know what I'm doing'. So I had like a portfolio of stuff, but it dawned on me very quickly, that, certainly in an American context, they didn't give a, a, a...that wasn't what was at issue here, it was...all they wanted to know was

'could I solve their problem for them?'.
'

SN: Wow.

AC: And I, and I could. So I delivered a report overnight, and spoke...worked with the mason. And I then I went, after a break for 3 days, worked with the crew and got them all... But erm, so err during that process, during that...after the

first day, and I went 'round with them and I was saying well what was wrong, but I was aware obviously that they'd done a lot a work, and I couldn't just say 'well this is crap'. Cos that wouldn't work with the craftsmen that were there...you 'ave to sort of... So I diplomatically went 'round saying how they could do it better, and maybe this was OK, and all that sort of stuff. But, erm after that day, the clerk of works, who was a man in 'is 60s came to me and he just, quietly, I was makin' notes on the site, and 'e just said,

'you, are you an American?'. And I said

'no, I'm not I'm British'. And he said, he said

'you should be an American, we need people like you'. He said that 'I've been in this business for 40 years and I learnt something from you today. You need to be here'. And then that was that. The sorta thing that no clerk a works in this country, and probably no architect would ever say to you. And then 'e went, the day I left, 'avin' sorted it out and everyone was workin' together, and 'e came, he came again to me and 'e said 'look I've been away, I've been away for a week on holiday' he said 'when I left, everyone on this site wanted to kill each other. Everyone was at each others throats. I've come back and they're all working fantastically, and they're all working smoothly, and they're all getting on'. And 'e said 'and that's down to you, and don't you ever forget that'. And it was just such a nice thing...

KL: Mmm, mmm

AC: ...that.... And so then we left. And that...that was that. But that, and that kind of, just the whole thing about America where the craftsman is absolutely respected, and where they actually want to listen to the craftsman. And the architect I worked with on that first project was a Canadian, and he just when we driving to site, he said

'look', when I first met 'im, the first this 'e said to me was 'look, I'm an architect. I know when I go on site that I do not know, and I will never know as much about what you and the other guys are doing, and my job is just to pull it all together and make sure that everything works'. And again that sort of humility in an architect, it's just not an experience you get in this country. And my experience always in this country is if you, y'know, cos I'm not a normal craftsman, I do have...not sayin' they don't...but I think about things and I like the other side of things. I like the anlysis and the understanding an all that as much. But when you express that to architects, you'll always reach a point where they suddenly realise you know more than they do, and, in this country, in my experience, generally speaking, is always a problem. You hit that glass ceiling and then they want, they have to keep you in your place after that.

KL: Mmm.

AC: Rather than actually embracing...and similarly, another architect I worked with in Vermont. 'E just said 'look, once everyone knows you're here I won't get a look in, but until they do I wanna make the most of you I can'.

KL: Haha.

AC: And that's, y'know, that's the attitude. It's just a totally different attitude. Erm, and it, that changed my understanding of what I knew, and what I could do with what I knew, if you know what I mean, and I could actually, I could actually communicate it to other people. So, for me personally, going to America was err, was a changing experience in that sense. But equally, I was, there was always a part a me that thought 'well is, is this just cos I'm in America'.

SN: Uh huh.

AC: Cos they...I'm British, so I've got an advantage, they're just gonna listen to what I say anyway, cos I'm British. And they've got this problem where they think the British know more than they do..

KL: Mmm.

AC: And maybe it's not real, d'you know what I mean? So then, for various reasons, I ended up makin' the decision to stop goin' to America, so I stayed here and actually think I've probably proved to myself over the last 5 years that 'yeah I can do it', here as well as there. But the idea that I could do it all was certainly sewn in that experience in America. And also that experience of craftsman in America, because that was the unexpected thing to me, was that actually, typically, American craftsmen are much better craftsmen than British ones. As a general wrung, they're still very much more into...certainly in New England anyway, far more in touch with historic craft practices than people here are. Far more prepared to do things steadily and get them done properly. Far more able to talk about things, to work as a...you know, where they're actually thinkin'. They're part, they're part of the system of the build. And everythin' else in a way that people aren't here. Erm, and what 3 months ago we spent 3 days on the Dog and Duck Hotel site in Richardtown, we were thrown off the site by the site manager for looking at a historic window. For showing interest in grade II* listed building. And we were thrown off site.

SN: Why?

KL: I don't understand that...

AC: Because we were showing interest. And that was why... And because they, they thought I might be causing trouble. But equ...but mainly because, as I say we were told as soon as 'do not look at the building, do not go anywhere in the building that you're not supposed to be. Do this, do that'. It's all very regimented and it's all about... Ev, everyone I spoke to on site, working on that site was...it was like a mantra, 'I do what I'm told. I do as I'm told'.

SN: And is that...

AC: And implicit in that staaement 'I do what I'm told even when I know that it's wrong, and it's not what I should be doing as a craftsman. I'll do what I'm told cos if I don't I'll be sacked'. And that, that's again the opposite of what you find in America, y'know where it's the... And the clients in America as well. I mean I did work for several years on a very big project that's still going on, a Hollywood movie guy, but a very educated one, very sophisticated guy who was building his own house, and wanted to use lime an all these things, which was why I got involved. But erm, but they're lookin' to the craftsman not to an architect, usually, for where they go with things. And if there's a problem or whatever. And that again is a totally different attitude. And I find that to be a problem in this country generally, that's generalizing...

SN: Yeah.

AC: Obviously there are exceptions to that, but there is this general culture where the craftsman needs to do what 'e's told, compromise... Y'know, you're not in control of your craftsmanship on most sites.

KL: A a a...

AC: Or if you try to be....you are, but at other times you're not. And if you try to be, they're always telling you 'well no you need to skimp', and 'you need to do this'. Or 'you need to..'. And it's very difficult to keep control. And the only way you can, is to be self employed, very often, and to, I feel...that's my experience, y'know. But then very often you'll have to walk off a job. I mean that job that started me on that route on Portland, we 'ad to walk off the job in the end, because they wanted us to do something that we just didn't agree with. Philosophically...

SN: Uh huh

AC: ...and it was, well we'd almost finished then. And I'm in that same position now with my big client. Where they've, as far as I'm concerned, they've jettisoned all the conservation principles that they said they agreed with, they're breaking listed building consent law hand over fist in the Dog and Duck. And across the road. And I'm not longer prepared to even be associated with them, but then that's...they were tellin' me...as we had this discussion, I'm being told 'if you wanna achieve what you wanna achieve, you need to make compromises', but they were compromises you don't make. You don't watch white cement being thrown around on a grade II las...listed building, or if you... Or my feeling is, if you...once you go down that road, of compromise of that sort of compromise, then you're lost, really as a craftsman. But, y'know...

SN: So on site, you talked about the Dog and Duck. Is it the main contractor that's having that attitude, or is it the client...?

AC: Yeah, the main contractor.

SN: Right.

AC: But the client appointed the main contractor, y'know.

SN: Uh huh.

KL: And what do you think really is pushing them in that direction then?

AC: Expediency, and, in this case, err, parsimony...

KL: Mmm.

AC: ...I mean on that particular project I don't...we won't go into that too much. But that to me...

KL: ...can in general terms...

AC: ...sums up the way that this... I mean I can't help but talk about that, because that, for me, I mean I've worked in Richardtown for the last 10 years, because this particular employer said, who own the whole town, that they wanted to pursue best practice conservation. They wanted to use lime, which they still do...they wanted... And so I took them at their word, and I've over the years built a team of people around me that do what they say they want to do, they encouraged us to do training as you know, but never actually supported us, so I always took the risk. But I was happy to do it in that context because...y'know they seemed to be guaranteeing us work, because one of the, obviously one

of the reasons most craftsmen don't like doing training, is that they're training people who may then compete against them.

KL: Mmmm.

AC: What we've actually found, in truth in the last 3 years, is that's exactly what 'as 'appened. I've trained people who now they're using instead of me.

KL: Right OK.

AC: Cos they're cheaper. Perhaps, or whatever. But in the case of the Dog and Duck, that was a flagship project...but they've...they're very good at makin' their tenants use lime and do things right. They'll go outta their way, they'll go to great lengths to make that happen. The sadness for me was that, as soon as they took on a project, which is the Dog and Duck, and they were payin' the bills, everythin' went outta the window. And so they generated a specification that was for gypsum everywhere, and cement, and, and... And then pretended they didn't know that's what'd happened, so, when I drew their attention to it, erm...but then put the work out to tender on the basis of this utterly flawed specification and schedule of works, to the likes of FirmGB16 and people. Got 6 quotes in on that basis, the lowest was £1,000,000 less than the highest, and at that time the project budget was only 2 and a half million. And what did they do? They took the lowest. So, they took they took a firm that'd been a million pound cheaper than the top price, who had priced the job on the basis of usin' modern materials, but then of course in the course of the planning process, and because they, that's what they say they believe, they then changed everything to lime, and all these things. But of course that's all extra costs, because of course this firm didn't price to do that, they priced to do gypsum and their skillsets are probably not anyway appropriate... And then as I say, in those few days we were on site, I saw a garage full of white cement. And no contractor in my opinion has white cement on site, unless they're lookin' to pretend they're usin' lime. Cos there's no reason...

KL: Oh right, I see.

AC: ...and err, so they stopped them doin' that, they say. But having said that, they put a totally unrealistic schedule on the works, so they started the contract...this is a complete refit of a massive pub. Started the works in November, and, and are saying that the hotel will be open in the middle of March. Well I mean if you use lime plaster, that's impossible. Apart from anything else...

KL: Cos of the time of year for...

AC: Well it's just not long enough, for time. And so everything in that project is set to make sure that expediency is the only way forwards. And then of course they found loads of extras, so the budget now is running at probably £8 million... And, and erm...I don't...yeah anyway, I could go on... The, the, the...none of that is an accident, that's the problem. That shouldn't be happening because...if they say what they say they believe, none of that would've been done in that way.

KL: Mmmm

AC: That's...the structure of that, and erm, but of course it's their money suddenly, rather than their tenants money that...and, and so that's the way it's gone. It then goes in terms of philosophy, like there's the Dog and Duck stables

across the road, there's the stable buildings that 'ave been neglected for 50 years. Through no fault of their own. The leaseholder was, it was on a non-repairing lease so they couldn't make them do anything.

KL: Uh huh

AC: But they are important Georgian stables, with all their stables in tact...but they have very...the coach house in particular, stop me if I get too distracting here, but the coach house in particular, there, ha this traditional pattern of lathe and lime torching on the top, under the pantiles. But in that particular case, and yesterday I was in the archive and established this, that coach house was built for the Mail, for the Royal Mail, to make that a post house, and the ruins above the coach house, and the stables are, were for the post boys to stay in overnight as they moved on. So the interiors of the 1st floor are all plastered, and plastered on...so you've got lathe on the roof, and the plaster is on the underside of the lathe as well. So very particular and very spec...that's the special character of those buildings.

KL: Mmm.

AC: The owner of the, of the town, because 'e had this unrealistic idea that the hotel would be open in March, suddenly said in September 'right, we need those...I don't want those buildings lookin' a mess when the hotel opens', cos it's a luxury hotel. So suddenly this project that I've been workin' for 5 years in different ways, condition surveying, writing very detailed specifications, and I prodded every single timber so I know exactly what the condition of those buildings was, and it was very good, for all that they've been neglected. Suddenly they start a project in September, at the wrong time of year, which...and obviously if you're using lime for these roofs...

SN: Yeah....

AC: So the wrong time of year. So, and they're doing it for the wrong reason. They're doing it to make it look tidy for this hotel opening, and these are historic stables. So, so then suddenly...before Christmas I suddenly saw they'd stripped all of this lathe off...and again, as I say, I wrote the specification, although there's a new guy running it, and I think 'e's thrown my specs out the window, what I'm saying there I think, is that all the time I think I've been in Richardtown, every time they've worked on a historic building, and for all that they believe they say in conservation, historic fabric has been lost hand over fist. And every time I've kicked off about it, David, the agent says 'how does it happen?'. So I've spent the last 5 years tryin' to show them how it doesn't happen, which is that you...everyone in the process is aware of conservation principles. Everyone, not just the craftsman, not just the, the surveyor, or the architect, but everyone actually needs to be there. But it, but crucially you write a very detailed specification. And in the case of these buildings, the first time...and I'd worked on the Dentist's Office for 4 years, and did all of these things. Tried to show them by demonstration...that and, but in, as I say, in the case a these Dog and Duck stables, having written the condition survey, having written a very detailed specification over a year ago. I know that there's no....there's no excuse, the only they've decided is that

'we're gonna do it at the wrong time of year, in the depths of winter', and then, as I say, I saw all of that lathe being stripped off and being felt and battened...

KL: So that's completely lost now is it?

AC: It's completely lost. So I kicked off, I actually got 5 minutes with the MD, who happened to be in town, the owner, And I pleaded with him, I said 'look these roofs are being lost hand over....everywhere, because people just go in, and they strip them off, and they put felt and batten'. And I said 'I nowhere else, in this context, if you do that in this building you're robbing it of its special significance, cos you can't plaster underneath', and as soon as you remove the historic pattern of the roof, you're gonna have to insulate the roof, according to building regulations. If you didn't you've got exemption because of it's historic character.

KL: Right.

AC: So I said 'you will have to insulate, so what you gonna do? Are you gonna put Kingspan between each rafter instead of...'. Y'know, and I thought I'd won, and Reece wrote to the conservation officer, sayin 'oh no we weren't doing that, we...they were all rotten, so we're gonna reinstate like-for-like'...

KL: Yeah.

AC: Here we are now, and you'll 'ave driven past it today. They've felt and battened anyway. And they're just putting roof tiles on. So, I think that's...and without listed building...I think that they should've had listed building consent to 'ave done that, because that is such a fundamental change to the special character of those buildings. But they...just ploughed on through...and for the wrong reasons, as I say. Their justification for doing it was 'well it's the wrong time of year, we can't use lime'. But they chose the time a year...

KL: Those, those building have no protection of any sort then?

AC: No, they're listed buildings.

KL: Oh right. Oh they are listed!

AC: I must admit, I got them listed 2 years ago because was aware then that things were going a bit awry, I felt. So I got them spot listed because it was an oversight that they weren't. Because they are the stables of the hotel, which is grade II*...

KL: Yes...

AC: ...people always assumed that they were covered, but they weren't. So I did get them listed. And we got a very good listing, a very good description, long, y'know...for...

KL: So despite all that. Right.

AC: Erm, I haven't been allowed on site so I don't know, but I, I would be very surprised if the stable stalls haven't all gone, and they're Georgian stable stalls. So I mean...so that's, that's kind of, as I say, for me that's a huge personal disappointment because it, I always said when I decided to not, to stop goin' to America and to stay in Richardtown....because I'd become so disillusioned over the years, actually, in actually achieving conservation on the ground. How difficult it is, erm, because of money. Err, y'know, because of people driving things through. And people not accepting that usually it's cheaper to do it right, and to conserve, than it is to renew. But, they, y'know, that argument's very hard to win, unless the client's are in to that. And I did feel we had a client here, but I always said to myself 'well if we can't achieve it in the end in Richardtown, I might as well give up. Cos we're never gonna achieve it anywhere', cos it is somebody who says they believe in this.

KL: Mmmm mmm

AC: But still, when the chips are down, doesn't actually, or thinks their understanding of what it is... So I think at the moment they've gone back to, well they're back where they were 10 years ago, now, in my opinion, when I first arrived, which is that they use lime to point with, but probably NHL5...

SN: Mmm.

AC: And, th...so all the deep understanding we've developed....and right now, the Dentist's Office is about to be sacrificed, sucked into the hotel, and made...except that English Heritage and people are defending the Dentist's Office at the moment. Erm, the same firm might've just m...were expecting to move into there. Y'know, and this is a, what will be within a few months, I'm confident, a grade I listed building, but it's currently grade II*. Erm, which we again 'ave...erm, well, we did when we were working on the Dentist's Office, in 2008, we had a conservation fair, and so it was a building site, but we'd revealed the whole of the interior, and we had a conservation fair in Richardtown with Edgedale District Council, and, and it was a big event. I mean at that time it was the biggest event in Richardtown for a long, long time. And, and we had 800 people came through the house. Everyone thought I was mad...the owner thought I was mad, the..but we had 800 people through the house on the Saturday, and we had courses running in the house, we 'ad, on the day before. We had lectures about different aspects of conservation and stuff... And I'd done that very much on this, my belief that craftsmen should be delivering this sorta thing to architects, rather than the other way around, y'know or...

KL: Mmmm.

AC: And it 'ad been incredibly successful, and I...again I was, but I see that very much as part of what we do. That conservation is....people tell you, like they are telling me now, that you've gotta compromise, you've gotta, y'know, this is a rarified thing conservation, but actually I think the opposite. That if you engage the local population, if you engage people with the ideas of conservation, and the best way a doing that is to show them a building that's being conserved...y'know what I mean...?

KL: Mmm.

AC: ...let them into it. Erm, and that, as I say was very successful. We got the SPAB, we got all these people engaged, and English Heritage were support... All these people were very supportive, and that's always been my philosophy...that you communicate with all these people, you show them tryin' a do the best, and you are doing the best, and you're not doing anything bad, and you communicate, and, and typically I've got left alone. I got left alone in the Dentist's Office. The conservation officer, if I found anything I'd say 'well d'you wanna come and 'ave a look'. And he wouldn't bother. We're now in a situation where, with the Dog and Duck, the 1st plans were so flawed that, these people, they didn't object, but they...and I objected. I mean, again I tried to discuss with the owner, but they just kept saying

'oh, if you really have a problem object'. So I did in the end. And they, they adopted 80% of the concerns. But it didn't...no-one ever went, no-one went as far as objection because it was almost as if they'd shut their eyes and let

people who shouldn't have been preparing the specs prepare them, and they'd made a mistake, that's how it was presented. But they've now followed that up with, with applications for the gardens, again these historic gardens. And the Dentist's Office is next to the Dog and Duck, and they've, they've redrawn the boundaries, so they've, they've taken the whole of the gardens of the Dentist's Office up to the back door of the building, into the hotel curtilage, and they're putting a road through the back garden. Now I don't wanna...this is a bit obscure, but you know the building, and the Dentist's Office is a late medieval, but what we see is largely late 17th century, and the gardens that go with that building survive all the way down to the river, from the late 17th century. And we 'ave drawings of those gardens from 1730, so we know what they looked like. Erm, and it's always been a wonderful opportunity to restore those gardens, and the house, and, and what the conservation fair demonstrated to me, if I needed to know that, of any building in Richardtown, the Dentist's Office is the one that everyone in Richardtown really identifies with. It sort of made real these obscure concepts like cultural identity and cultural property, but that really was what the Dentist's Office is, for the people of Richardtown. So it 'ad seem to me by...after that, that really the outcome for the Dentist's Office needed to be something that gave people access to that building. That was my opinion. When I expressed that to the owner, he put me in my place and told me 'no,,it's my building and I will do what I like with it, and it won't be a public outcome'. And what's actually unfolding is we've got the Dog and Duck, which is as important a building, in fact. And the Dentist's Office next to it, as I say, they've now redrawn the boundaries of the Dog and Duck garden to include the gardens of the Dentist's Office, right up to its back door. And the road through the back of the Dentist's Office to service the Dog and Duck. The only justification being so that dirty laundry can be taken away without the people staying at the Dog and Duck having to see it, coming or going. And that's the only reason, for going through a garden that actually is on a medieval burgage plot, and one of its boundaries is formed by the medieval town wall. So it's...

KL: Mmmm.

AC: And it's been there for 1000 years without molestation. And suddenly they're...and, and what's now happened a course is that English Heritage, conservation officer, Yorkshire Gardens Trust, the Georgian Group, the SPAB and various academic...and academic in particular, have lodged formal objections to these plans, and they will be thrown out. And this is in the context of them ignoring...so all this hard work that I've done, for 5 years, developing these relationships, where these people wanted to be part of what we were doing, has just been thrown outta the window by a combination of incompetence and arrogance, because they wanna.... I didn't, I told them as soon as I heard about the plan, I said 'that to me is unacceptable, because you're robbing the Dentist's Office of any future that isn't part of the Dog and Duck, and...but you're not bein' honest either, cos you're not sayin' what the Dentist's Office will be. You're saying you don't know, but at the same time you've redrawn the...so it can't be anything other than something part a the hotel'. And this site manager, before 'e threw us off site, told me that it was gonna be the err hotel manager's accommodation.

SN: Right.

AC: Err....and so, but had they...but they've now alienated all of that trust, because part of the objection...it's very clear in the English Heritage objection. She says 'look, we met, you met on site in 2011', English Heritage, SPAB, Georgian Group, conservation officer. 'We told you at that meeting that a road through the Dentist's Office was an unacceptable dilution of the significance of that building and its garden. And you've gone ahead and put the plans in anyway. And, not only that, you've not accompanied those plans with any historic assessment of the Dentist's Office. Your robbing its garden, without any, y'know, any understanding, or any...

SN: Yeah.

AC: ...document that supports, or that says even what the Dentist's Office is. D'you know what I mean?

SN: *muffled*

AC: It's just incompetent apart from anything else. And as Amy said 'that in itself is in absolute contravention of...y'know...of PPS5 section whatever', and she's saying 'well we can't even consider the application, let alone reject it, because they have ignored PPS5. So...'. Anyway, that's all a di...something of a distraction, but that's the kinda complex world that you operate in though, and you, either you....I find that unacceptable, and as I say, I can't...it's difficult to work on a project, I find it difficult to work on a project and just do the masonry or...y'know, I want to understand the building as well. And that I see as being part of my job, and part of conservation, but it's also the pleasure I take in a job. There are plenty a people out there, and John, who works with me a lot, who don't take that same interest I spose. But I think their skills are diminished if they don't.

SN: Uh huh.

AC: I think, is what I would say in the context of skills. That it's a much...the thing about conservation if anything is that it's a broader thing, or it broadens your horizons you hope, and your skills are part of that. That your skills are more than just putting a stone in. It's...

KL: Mmm.

AC: ...really understanding whether you should be putting that stone in, or taking a new one out, or restoring, or what...to what level you go, or you clean, whatever. And you need to understand the importance of the building in order to do that right I spose.

SN: Yeah.

AC: Yeah. Sorry I've been ranting on a bit there, but...

SN: There's a couple a things that you mention though that are interesting. Erm, cos we've talked to quite a few people about tendering, haven't we (to KL) and I just wondered you experience of sort of....and y'know, we talked about the tender process at the Dentist's Office...

AC: Yes.

SN: ...and how maybe that was...you said that they took the cheapest...

AC: At the Dog and Duck, yeah

SN: At the Dog and Duck, sorry yeah. But yeah, we won, I wondered if you'd erm been involved in the tendering at all?

AC: Yeah, I mean my experience, and again that's what I'd hoped we'd achieved in Richardtown, it seemed like we have...where I was encouraged....every time we did a training event, I'd get people queuing up, asking me could they come and work in Richardtown. And, and with David's encouragement, I was happy to say 'w...yes, y'know, if you go self-employed, and'...and the way it worked was that we were all self employed, but the owner was paying us individually. So I wasn't...I was running the team...

SN: Mmm.

AC: But I wasn't, I wasn't getting any mark up on their labour, which suited the way I think about things. Equally, it was very beneficial to the owners, because they were paying £15 an hour or whatever, and that worked very well. Erm, so the Dentist's Office and any smaller jobs, but for the Dentist's Office I managed to persuade 'im that we, that we did do that on time and materials. So everything that was done in there was done on time and materials, and in my opinion that is the best way to work on any historic building, is time and materials. But you obviously have to trust the craftsman that you're working with, but I'd earned that trust with the owner I thought, and err in our op...certainly in our opinion, we didn't, we didn't take the mickey at all...

SN: Mmmm.

AC: You know, we were very honest and fair. Erm, and the Dentist's Office, the works cost y'know, the house is 3 months off completion, but that project 240,0...so far has cost about £240,000. Now, in 2001 the works'd been priced by Warwick, or works, and in 2001 the price was £350,000, and actually I would say that half of the works we did, half of the value of the works we did were works that were extra and had not been priced for in that original thing.

KL: Mmmm.

AC: And so, in that context, and in the context of the fact that we so....as a bunch of us. I mean, for the 1st year or 2 I was workin' there I was getting £16 an hour, you know. And then others were workin...and so...but then even at the height of it, I was, I was on no more than £20 an hour. And others were on £10, and others....and they were just payin' them that, they weren't payin' me £0 or £5 for each of them, and I was takin' off, rakin' off money. So every which way you might look at that, and that seemed to be a good deal for the owner...

SN: Mmmm.

AC: But every which...every time they were saying we were too expensive. It was costing too much money. And David said to me, at one time 'if I'd known the Dentist's Office was gonna cost this much, we wouldn't've even started the work'. Nevermind that it'd been empty for 12 years and was on the buildings at risk register. And that's their attitude, and actually, unfortunately, that's the danger in time and materials, is that they've got nothing to compare it with.

SN/KL: Mmmm.

AC: So then what happened at Gorton's Mill, when I first met you (to SN). And you came and did a little bit there. He came to me and 'e said 'well I need, I want you to make more money'. So this one we wanna, we're gonna prepare a specification and you, you'll price the masonry, and this joiner guy that I'd been workin' at the Dentist's Office'll price the timber side of it, the joinery side. And we won't go and ask anyone else, but we want you to give us a price. And so, but in the context of everything that'd gone before. So, if we'd messed up a....sometimes when I'd given 'im an

estimate, and it 'ad clearly been underestimated 'e always said 'e wouldn't let me lose money, or whatever, so, there seemed to be a great trust there. But what he did, in that context, and I, I found it very difficult at the time not to interpret that as a rejection of everything we'd been doing at the Dentist's Office, or the way we'd been doing it. He appointed a project manager. So this was a major, this was a 17, 18 mill building. It's one a the only surviving mills on the river in Richardtown., but the quaysides with it were 1725. But again it 'ad been empty for about 12 years. And the specification was bad, it wasn't thorough. So once we got on site the timbers were rotten, there were beams like this thick and they were all just riddled with dry rot and stuff. But as we were pricing this work, both I and the joiner were saying 'well what about this? You're not asking us to price this. What about this?'. And, they'd say

'don't you worry yourself about that'. And this project manager...again I could go on, but I won't, this project manager, the trouble was, his background was from a civic engineering company. So his only experience prior to running this conservation project on a historic building was laying Tarmac and paving, and that sorta thing. So it was a ridiculous, bizarre idea that this guy should be put in charge, but of course as the project unfolded it was obvious why he was there. He was there to nail us to the floor, and so by the end a that contract, the cost of extras was more than the original quote, tender. And they then set about tryin' to make sure we didn't get any a those extras. Or kept it to a minimum. And so the whole thing was an exercise in, not in allowing us to earn more money. But in that process, because he'd wanted to do it that way, I'd taken the risk, so I had all the team that we'd built up around, who previously they'd been paying, I was paying them. And so when that project panned out, I earned nothing. They all got paid, but I lost 15 grand. And then the owner just wouldn't deal with it, so and it was like...and I was waging a vendetta against this guy, and things like this, y'know. And at the moment it's taken 2, 3 years now...But the joiner.... And they kept sayin 'well we want you to do this work, and this work'. And it was reachin' a point where I had to make the choice

'do I take them to court for this money or not?'. And they wouldn't even go to mitiga...they wouldn't go to mediation, they wouldn't, they just dealt with it in such an unprofessional way. You couldn't get anywhere. You'd, you'd say 'well let's go to mediation then'. Well they said

'well we'll go to mediation'. So then I'd ask, I'd say

'well OK, well 'ere's a mediator'. They said

'no, no we don't want him'. And it was just like so obstructive, and they did the same with the joiner. He walked away, and...for they...I, they said to me

'well if you take us to court, you will never work for us again'. And then they were saying, well, with the Dog and Duck, David comes to me and says

'we want you to be the nomi...you're gonna be the nominated subcontractor for all the exterior works at the Dog and Duck'. So then I've gotta ask the question

'well do I', I couldn't afford...because it was a big knock to us as a company.

SN: Mmmm.

AC: I couldn't afford to take them to court actually, cos I didn't have the money and I was being advised by solicitors w...that potentially it would cost about £120,000 to...

SN: What? To take them to court?

AC: To get this 15 grand. The way these sorta things worked out, and especially with such an obstructive err firm like the owner. And so, so that all went bad. And then the way David constructed that was that I was a bully, and I was impossible to work with. Now what's actually happening, the joiner has finally found a solicitor's who, after a lot of discussion, they're taking the owner to court on his behalf, on a no win no fee basis. They're so confident they've been so badly...they dealt with it so badly, that they'll do it on that basis. And they're a national firm.

SN: Right.

AC: So he will probably get 20, well plus the costs and everything else, that could end up costing them 100 grand. All 'e wanted from them was 8 in the...that they didn't pay 'im. Do you know what I mean? I mean...

KL: Mmm

AC: And, and so, so that didn't work. But that was, I'd kind, what I'd, I'd proposed a system like that, where I'd said to 'im 'well it's ridiculous isn't it, that you, you get a main contractor in who has....because they can deal with all the health and safety, and all these things. But you're a big firm', as I say 'you own the whole town. You can provide the health and safety, just get me to price the masonry, or someone like me. And get someone to price the joinery, and we're not markin' anything up, and all a that'. And, but, as I say, what actually transpired was this system that was a bit like that, but where the spec was all wrong and then 'e puts in charge somebody who...

KL: So who drew up the spec in the first place then?

AC: Well, it 'ad been written by a surveyor but then, but...what the owner...it's difficult to avoid because obviously that's my experience recently, but what the always do is they try and proscribe the cost of everything, and so they'll get a surveyor in and, and it was a surveyor who wrote it, erm, who is a conservation surveyor. But they're told not to do, not to spend too much time, or not to spend too much money, so the idea of goin' and prodding every timber would cost them money, so they don't do that. But then what happens, as soon as this guy got involved, he pulled loadsa stuff out of it anyway, so it was an even less thorough specification...

SN: Who, the project manager?

AC: Yeah. Obviously in retrospect, so that he could not pay us.

KL: So did you do any of the extra work and not get paid, or did you...

AC: Yeah well...

KL: ...not undertake it?

AC: No we did all the extra work.

KL: So you did it, right.

AC: We were involved by then, and we couldn't not. But there were several times when we wanted to walk away because every valuation he was takin' money off us.

KL: Mmmm.

AC: And in the face of the most....well....there were things that, it was just obvious to everyone that it'd taken us so much time. And of course, in the contract, any extras were supposed to be on time and materials. Y'know, you 'ad a day rate.

KL: Mmmm.

AC: But even that, you question it all the time. And you, it was, well it didn't take that long. And all 'e'd ever say to you was 'seems excessive'. And 'e'd ask for justification, and I mean mine and the joiner's files of justifications for extras, and the cost of them, are about that thick. But all we ever had from this individual was 'seems excessive'. He never justified why 'e wasn't gonna pay us, just that 'e well 'that sounds a lot'. D'you know what I mean? And it was just crazy. So that was the next exp, that was that experience. And then, but then thereafter David was sayin', 'well', and then they were usin' us on time and materials again. But one of 'is reasons that 'e said I'd lost money was cos the team, around me, had not been working hard enough. But then he was paying them all time and materials on other jobs. So, y'know, it was all nonsense. But...and then 'e, so then 'e characterises the whole thing...because I was so adamant that this guy was so inappropriate, because 'e was, 'e was another psychopath, really. I mean my wife knows very well. I mean she was there on site a lot a the time. 'E was just impossible to deal with, an 'is only way of dealing, was bullying. It was like the old fashioned estate, y'know, site practices. And everyone we spoke to said 'well, you know this guy's 30 years out of date, this is not how construction sites work'. You just bully everyone and you keep them in their place, and you don't, and you rip 'em off wherever you possibly can. And, and that's, it's just the opposite it seemed of what we had been tryin' to achieve.

SN: Mmm

AC: So then after that, he, he, and because I was very vocal about it, I was sayin' 'David, if this is the way forward for you, you can forget it, I'm not interested, this is not what I'm here to do. I'll go somewhere else'. And, and so he then in the end decided I was waging a vendetta against this individual... But he was gonna run all, he was goin' around tellin' everyone he was now in charge of all the historic buildings in Richardtown, and stuff. And I think 'well if that's the case...'. So that's the con...that's when I got the Dog and Duck spot listed because I thought 'well this guy, 'e's tellin' us 'e's gonna be runnin' that', and I said 'well I won't be there, if 'e is, but...'. You know, and we had to fight tooth and nail to save every last bit of historic fabric in that warehouse. As it happened. I had to even go to the conservtion officer, at times, to get him to say to them 'no you can't do that', and so again everything felt...it felt then that everything was going wrong. So then 'e spent a year sorta saying

'well, I want you to do this, and I want you to do that, but, but we can't...we've gotta find a way of doing it that...y'know...'. But, so I got Phillip Saunders, Phillip Saunders came and, after that experience, Phillip came to him and said, spent an afternoon, gave 'im an afternoon of 'is time, well a day of 'is time cos 'e came from Lancashire to do it. Sat down with David and said look

'you've actually, you've got this crew of people that all do what you want them to do, and do it in the way that you want. And Alan's there running the whole thing for you. You've got something that no-one else, everyone, y'know a lot a people would die for, so these are the ways you could do it. Y'know, you can do it on measured rates. Why not work out measured rates? Why not work out a contract system where you contract with Alan and the crew that they'll do all the necessary repairs in a 3-year period, on these measured rat...you know, so much a metre for brickwork, or whatever'.

SN: Uh huh.

AC: Y'know, 'and you can work that out, and site down and work it out'. And 'e just didn't want, he didn't engage with any of it, any of it David. And so...erm, and then, as I say, he was sayin'

'well I want you, you're gonna be the nominated subcontractor on this work', and so I didn't take 'im to court, cos I thought

'well I've got all these guys', because by then I was having to try and keep all these guys in work, cos they weren't anymore...

SN: Uh huh

AC: And I felt an obligation towards them, and so I thought 'well I can't', y'know, 'even if I win, it's gonna cost a huge amount a money that I 'aven't got', but equally 'I won't get this work'. Then when it came to it of course, we didn't get the work anyway. It was just a, it was a lie. It was just to stop me takin' 'em to court. And so, but I've hung in the...I did hang in there, I have for the last year, you know, until recently, with everyone sayin'

'you might as well forget it. They're not playing the right way'. So to answer your question, I do think that the only way to really do...the problem we had, and that's the problem that they agreed they had, when we did, started the Dentist's Office, was that if you try and specify a historic building repair, especially in the context of...of somewhere like Richardtown where the building 'ad been empty for a long time, it's virtually impossible to do, because the building is...there's so many unknowns.

KL: Mmmm.

AC: Equally a building like the Dentist's Office, which had been offices, clearly was an important building, but it wasn't until we started working on it that we fully appreciated how important, because aware how much historic fabric had

survived. The, what I was always arguing to 'im, was 'you need to be able to respond to that, you can't'...because what typically happens, and what had happened on the Thunder PLC site elsewhere, where they'd had a big contractor in, if ever they found anything, it was bloody well covered up quick. So there's no response to that, it just gets in the way of their specifications and their schedules, so they don't, and they ripped up all the earth plasters and everything else in their that they shouldn't 'ave done. And they found windows, and instead of sayin' 'wow, we've found a window, let's think about that, what does that tell us about this...? Oh bloody hell, let's cover that up again quick'. And that's the opposite to how you should work on a historic building, in my opinion, y'know. And so that's what we did do at the Dentist's Office was we were able to respond, we did respond, and I, and they would say that that was exciting for everyone. For the owner and everyone else. But in truth, what we've seen since is that that was a problem to them, and so when the Dog and Duck started, although we had written, I had written the history a the Dog and Duck, really because we'd done that in the context of the Dentist's Office, cos they belonged to the same person and they had a very similar history. Instead of askin' me, 'e got Gavin Viegas in as the historic building assessor, and just gave 'im all my work. And I thought 'oh, right OK'. And then excluded us from the whole process...the reason they were excluding us was because they didn't want us to find things, and say to them 'well you can't do this, or you have to do it this way'.

SN: Mmmm.

AC: And, and so they're creating this pastiche Georgian hotel, but I was in the archive yesterday and Gavin 'as been there, and everyone else earlier, and found erm, err inventory, a, a, a specification for the changes that were made to the building when it was raised a storey, and internal changes by Peter Aitkinson the architect in York, who was a pupil of Carr's, where it actually lists all the changes. So it lists the mouldings and...

SN: Really. Right.

AC: ...and everything. So if they really wanted to restore it they could've done it from his...but instead a that they've not even accepted that this exists. When I spoke to Gavin 'e's, cos I, we found drawings of Aitkinson's for the spa in the Wentworth archive, the spa building, and I said to Gavin, cos we have communicated, 'oh Peter Aitkinson, yeah 'e's quite important'. He said

'Oh yeah, his name cropped up in the archive. Associated with the changes in 1808'. And that's what 'e said, and I thought 'oh'. And, so yesterday I was in there, an, and it's very clear that he was the architect in charge, he drew all....I mean there are references, y'know letters from 'im saying

'I'm enclosing the plans of, of the new elevations' and all this, which we don't know where they are, but clearly he was not, he was more than that. So they've just glided through that, and they're puttin' this pastiche Georgian thing in there, when yeah, as I say they could've infor... So that's the sorta thing I mean. That you, if you really want to do that, you would look to the archive, you would do that research, which was done but then ignored. And they're just buying

stuff off the shelf to me, to do this generic Georgian interior in, in what is actually a 17th century building. But, that's the sort of thing that depresses me!

SN: Yeah

AC: D'you know what I mean?

SN: Yeah.

AC: And erm, so...

SN: When it...things like, the unknowns on site and making pricing difficult in advance and stuff like that, does that then undermine the competitive tendering process?

AC: Erm....

SN: Or is it, is there another way of doing competitive tendering....?

AC: Well yeah, I ju... I mean I'm fairly cynical about all of that, and y'know, as an example, and I know you're dealing with Bramhall's, but I mean in the last 2 years I've priced jobs where I've been me and the, there's...I've been against Bramhall's and Warwicks's, and on every one a those occasions I've been told by the architect at the end that I was the most expensive.

SN: Right

AC: And I know that cannot be true. I, i, in reality that can't be true. My overheads are a fraction of theirs...

KL: Mmmm.

AC: What I would say is that I price a job I price it to do it right. And I price to look after the lime properly, and all a these things. And I think realistically, if anything, tight. I mean we often don't earn the money in the end. But firms like that are able to buy the work in, and they'll do that, and that's where the specification is so important. Because what a lot a the big firms'll do is calculate 'well OK, there are loads of extras gonna come on here. And, so we'll go in at a loss, but we'll win it back on the extras as the project goes on'. Rather than, whereas I would tend to say...I'd phone the architect, say

'well look, you've missed this. What d'you wanna do about this? Do you wanna price for this? Or...'. So...

KL: So the extras...there'd be some kind of allowance within the contract for...

AC: And usually a very healthy one. I mean I, recently we did a....chancel, the chancel of Colton, and erm, it's the first time I've worked with 'em, but that was with Aitkins Global the architects, who are major architects surveyors. And actually the day rate there, by the time you'd worked it out, was £1,500 a day for 2 men. Well that's far more than you would price the job at.

KL: Mmm

AC: And so, and that's fairly standard obviously. So, yeah, you'll make loads of money on the extras, I would rather there weren't any extras in the first....y'know, I price a job typically to account for...

KL: You're not comparing like with like basically to account for...

AC: You're not, but then the skill...and this, that particular architect. I, again, he, in those cases he'd specified NHL5 for the pointing, so I, I mean I've priced it and I've put a note, if I price a job like that, sayin' 'I would not be prepared to use NHL5'. This is for brickwork, y'know, so I would, I would use a much softer lime. But obviously if you do use NHL5, you don't need to look after it as much cos it behaves like cement. You can just put it in and walk away, whereas I, I'm sayin' 'well I'm not prepared to do that. I'm gonna use soft lime', which does require you to spend time lookin' after it. But that's the best thing for the building. Erm, another firm might think, and a lot a them they like using NHL5, because it sets quickly and....

KL: Mmmm

AC: Erm, who don't maybe think as deeply or understand as deeply about lime as we fancy we do. Then they're gonna price it cynically and way 'wel...we're 'appy to use that'. So they're always gonna beat a firm like me that thinks it knows what it's doing and is pricing fairly, if they want to. That's the thing...

KL: *muffled*

AC: ...And obviously in the last...a big firm again....in the last few years they, they will a bein' buying work in, because they've gotta keep people in work, obviously they gotta big workforce on. And they're gonna buy work in, and what they...I know for small works, I've heard, cos I....cos several a the guys that work for me work for Bramhall's, so.... What they've done is they've sectioned off the small works, so anything under 50 grand their pricing that at £20 an hour. Whereas in fact...and then the big jobs are payin...so they're cross subsidising between the big jobs...

KL: Mmmm

AC: ...where they might get £40 an hour, to allow them to take the small jobs to keep people in work.

KL: So what's...

AC: Which is fine. But it's not sustainable is what I would say. And I, I fancy that this coming year we're gonna see a lot a those firms go down. Because they're obviously hugely indebted, to the banks, and it's really potentially, a lot a them could go.... As we have had, y'know, Linford's goin' down.

SN: Uh huh...

AC: Yeah, they're over extended, and obviously a lot a them in the last 2 years, which is the time I'm talkin' about, where they seem to 'ave been buyin' jobs in. And you hear the same from church architects, everyone, they're... There's only so far...they're gambling on the economy recovering, and of course it's not, it's going back down, so there is the potential I think... I mean another example. We priced a job err, a toilet. An addition, a new toilet on St Mary's in Richardtown just recently. Now, again, I...that's a job that's been running for years. They've been tryin' to get this...and I think 3 years ago they had prices at something like 85 grand, and they've been tryin a save some money. We did some work on the church last year, and they said 'we still haven't collected all the money'... And I said, I said

'that's an awful lotta money for a toilet'. I said 'why don't you go...', I said 'I suggest you go back out to tender because things 'ave changed'. Y'know, when you 'ad this priced masons were charging funny money for things...

SN: Uh huh.

AC: 'I would advise you to go back out to tender'. So, yeah OK, so they did. And Arnold Levy is the architect, so 'e put it back out to tender and 'e asked us, and 'e as... And I was talkin' to 'im about it before and 'e said... I said 'well that seems an awful lot...' I s... And 'e 'e said

'yeah well, I...' 'e said 'I'm thinkin' 40, 45'. And even then I thought

'That's a lot a money for a toilet'. But, but it was quite a high specification, so when I actually worked it all through...

SN: Mmm

AC: My price came out at 45.

SN: OK.

AC: And the plumbing was like 9...things I wasn't in control of, like the plumbing was 9 grand. But even the stone, sawn 6 sides and everything, was 6 grand. Just before you did any work to it. So it all added up...

SN: Mmmm..

AC: ...to 45. It came back, erm, Rielley's, who are a big building company locally, got the job for 23,000.

SN: *Intake of breath*

AC: So...and I was tight. I, I couldn't 'ave done it for less than 45. An I, I had...because I sorta thought 'well, 'e's sayin...'. I, I, I did up the spec, and that's one where I didn't stick to the spec, I did up it, so... 'E 'ad like a kingspand floor with a skim on, and I priced to do a laker floor, you know an insulated floor, and... So I upped the spec myself...and 'e priced for tiles on the floor, an I priced to do stone times. I'm thinkin' 'if I'm gonna do this, which is not what I normally do, new build, I at least wanna do it like this, and if I get it I get it, if I don't I don't'. But really didn't expect that a firm that size'd be able to come in half...

SN: They're a big firm aren't they?

AC:half my price. An Arnold Levy was fairly sanguine about it, 'e said 'well, no I've....'. He said that 'they're obviously doin' it at a loss, but they must desperate for work, so...'. And 'e said 'they've always done a good job in the past'. But, in truth that 23 is not even gonna cover the materials. In that job, so...

KL: Even at the lower spec?

AC: No. Even at the lower spec, it wouldn't really cover the materials for the most part, no. So, it's frightening, but that's what they're doing these big firms...

KL: They just want to...have some work, really?

AC: Because they've got people...

KL: Got to keep people occupied and...

AC: ...employed, yeah. Better that they're occupied, and they can at least show the bank that they've got work coming I through. Cos I think that's what they're all in hoc...

KL: Mmmm

AC: aren't they? I mean like one big firm, I remember hearin' a few years ago, they owe the bank a billion pounds. Y'know that's... It's a lot a money to owe isn't it?

KL: Mmmm.

AC: So that, I don't know. But, I mean on tendering, as I say, I do think measured rates or time and materials is the best case. I'm very happy to give a guide price, so that's a good way a working. Or, if the client says how much they've got...

KL: Yeah.

AC: I'm happy to work to that budget. But that all does rely on trust, or...integrity. If you're gonna go to tendering, the Italian system I think is the best, where you, y'know if you're gonna get 3 quotes, you knock out the top and the bottle and you take the middle. But you never take the lowest. Whereas in this country everyone always takes the lowest. And so...

SN: On that, erm, quite a lot, in the tendering process obviously relies on the specification. So d'you ever get asked for advice on specifications, y'know from the architects that are drawing them up.

AC: I have...yeah I have been, and condition surveys I've done. Erm, but what I, I'm doing more, we're doing one at the moment, of erm, management plans for English Buildings Trust. Where I do all that anyway...

SN: OK.

AC: ...so I'm, I've moved in...we're, y'know, we're actually writing the condition surveys and doing the surveys and the specifications and I'm getting the tenders in. So I'm sort of doing an architect's role. Ummm, I didn't know that, but I...several of the people we've s...accidentally or otherwise sent me the list of recommended people to do these management plans for the English Buildings Trust. So I, so I'm the only non-architect on there actually.

SN: Oh really?

AC: But there we're in a situation where inevitably I can beat them on price because I don't charge £100 an hour, y'know. Obviously, ermm. But I, again the ones we've done, we're told, y'know we do very good specificat...ours are very good, basically. Probably better than most architects. I've priced two of the ones that architects 'ave done for the, for the management plans, and yeah, the specs are inadequate, in my opinion, y'know, again, as a craftsman. They don't understand the materials enough, generally speaking.

SN: Uh huh

AC: And their principles are not necessarily that strong. I mean it's like...the one that we, that Bramhall's got when we were supposedly most...was a dove cote, and 'e 'ad...y'know they were puttin' sash windows into a dove cote...wh... That, you should ask...to me you ask the question is the client actually...y'know, 'e's getting' this money from English Building Trust, what's actually 'appening here...? Is 'e just gonna turn it into a holiday let in a few years time? Because why do you put sash windows into a dove cote? But...so, but...yeah so we do that kind of thing, and I'm, I'm very much of the opinion...and we've had this discussion about one particular job at the moment, where this Heron Mill, which is a 17th, 18th century mill, where the people there 'ave got in touch with us. They actually want us to do the

work, but, then 'e's gone around looking and looking at the websites of th...and 'e's, also wants me to do the management plan. So we've got this dilemma, what happens? Cos I..

SN: Can you tender to your own...?

AC: Well I've done one for them where English Buildings Trust then did say to me, which surprised me and said 'well I hope you're gonna tender as well'. And I think

'well actually, look, I'm supposed to be in charge of this job. How can I tender?'. But, but that's, but the other thing I would say, locally from my experience a that is that, I can't find 3 people to ask for a tender that I would trust.

SN: Yeah.

AC: Y'know, so that's the differe...so I can see the problem that architects have around here.

SN: Yeah.

KL: Mmmm.

AC: Erm, I mean an I, and so I would ask myself if I could. And I do believe I've got the integ...but, but we're gonna have to face that with this Heron Mill. But then the problem, as I say, that's where I was goin' with that, is that, my advice to the client in the end was, actually it's better....if you have to choose it would be better to get me to do the management plan, and to oversee the project. Than it would be to get someone, another architect who you don't trust to do the management plan, cos a we may...he may not even ask us to be on the tender list...

KL: Mmmm.

AC: And, erm, but at least I, if the spec, and 'e won't necessarily write the specification you want, or you need. Whereas I will, and we'll just 'ave to cross that other bridge when we come to it, y'know, bec...but that's better, that you've got all that written down. Because I do believe that, and, that it, that's where it can all go badly wrong, is at that specification, and the condition surv, is that understanding of what's wrong with a building or not...

SN: Mmm.

AC: So you can, err, y'know, thinkin'....as most architect's'll tend to, they'll go to a structural engineer, and once you do that you're into the devil's territory, where you can end up spending your whole budget on totally unnecessary structural engineering. And, erm, so I tend not to go to structural engineers for instance, you know, so that saves them a lot of money. Cos usually it's not, well it's not necessary typically. But a lot a people'd think it might be, y'know or they... Errm, so, so I, and I do, yeah, I think there is a lot to be said for going 'round and jut prodding every timber and makin' sure y'know the right...amoun, level of specification, because you would hope then, that's how I advertise it... I say 'well if we do that, then the chances are that there won't be much extra. Cos you should know, what it's gonna cost you'. If you've done the specification right, and if people then price to that specification. Rather than leaving so much to chance...

KL: Mmmm

AC: Which in the context of historic buildings, there always will be stuff left to ch...err, unless you do that investigation. And even then there will be potentially, but, erm, but that keeps it to a minimum. And I hope, I think protects, defends

the historic fabric of a building better than if you just 'ave a very vague specification that then, y'know. Erm, can be subverted, or people go in lookin' to get the extras, y'know, in the first place. Which an awful lotta firms will do, I mean that's what they do. They try and generate extras from when they arrive on site. Very often.

KL: So is there still a lot a work out there in this area then?

AC: Erm we, we've not...yeah...

KL: Typically who are the clients, you know, private or charitable, churches, public...

AC: Well, err a mixture. I mean we've...this last year, if we look at that. We've done several domestic projects, so houses for individuals, we've done several little jobs for Dearing House, so that's an estate. We've done several with LEADER funding, which are these little £5,000 packages that LEADER locally are offering for historic building work....

KL: LEADER are offering...

AC: It's European Union money...

KL: Oh right, OK yeah.

SN: Comes via the rural payments agency...

AC: Yeah. And those, I'm very much in favour a those, cos they, it's not too much money...

SN: No.

AC: It's just about enough to do usually what's...

KL: And so who can get that money? Is that...

AC: Well that, people have to apply for it. Erm, but typically as with...almost the same with CDF, which is English Building Trust money, it's the rich that are the best at getting these things, and the people that really need it don't succeed so well.

KL: *muffled* Yeah, yeah.

AC: So, Dearing House 'ave 'ad 6 grand off....1 project we've done this year for them. On another level, we did...we rebuilt table toons for the church yar, in the churchyard at Colton with, with a similar grant. And that's, y'know that's much more a community oriented, y'know and...but not too much again that you...cos usually when you're dealin' with people like church wardens an that, they've got these great ambitions obviously to, to do loadsa things. So these grants keep that constrained if you like. Erm...

SN: There's been quite a lot a things like memorials cleaned and stuff...?

AC: Yeah, yeah. In the past, that's right, yeah. And we erm, but err, well we started the year on a church tower, so that was Northern Towers Trust, so erm, up in Northumberland. And we did the chancel at Colton church. Erm, so we've done a whole mixture really...that, the, they collected the money, so the PCC. But the church commissioners paid for what we did.

KL: Uh huh.

AC: Errm, and then other private individuals. So, a real mixture at the moment. And that's...

KL: Are you doin' any work for any err local authorities or things like that?

AC: No, I haven't and I don't tend to work for them. Erm...

SN: You did something on the hospital at York didn't...in York?

AC: Yeah, we did that for York, that 1 thing. That was subbing for Rielley's, who...well subbing for the mason. Just that conservation work on the Shakespeare figure on the top...

SN: Right.

AC: Yeah. But that was ver...that was £2,000 or something, it was just a small think, umm..

KL: So why did you tend not to do that then? Is there a particular reason?

AC: Err, no. I mean I did down in Dorset, we did quite a lot with Dorset County Council. They have, certainly Edgedale have an awful lot of, you have to be members of ridiculous trade organisations, y'know, health and safety organis... All of which are just money-making schemes.

KL: Mmm.

AC:really. So that's one thing, you know that they won't even entertain you if you're not.

KL: Yeah.

AC: Erm... I'm not that popular wi Edgedale District Council, so that's another thing. Because I've worked for Peverill Diocese, they're always at loggerheads. Erm, and I've ad a few issues with some things they've done, but th, th, that's going, that's another thing. But, so I've not gone outta my way...

KL: Right.

AC: It's not that I wouldn't work for them, it's not that, but they...there are some obstacles that an... Erm...in, yeah, just procedural obstacles if ya like.

KL: Yeah.

AC: And they're not...neither do they...but at the same time they don't themselves require, so like the CSCS cards, I've s, I've yet to be asked for a heritage skills c...card.

SN: Yeah.

AC: So that system which was good in its self, none of these people are actually applying it so, Edgedale aren't applying it, as far as I know they're not demanding it, and certainly the diocese didn't on this job, err at the Dog and Duck. And so, erm, but certainly for yeah some jobs I would, but there was one where I, yeah in the Milton rooms where somebody recommended that they talk to me about some cornice conservation issue, but they just said they wouldn't because I worked for the diocese. So...or I was too close to the diocese, cos the building belongs to them although it's on a 900 and odd year lease to the council, but, so there's all these...that's the reason locally I haven't. It's not that I wouldn't, erm, and because we are, we are a, I'm an accredited conservator, so there are times when they really ought to be using me...

KL: Uh huh.

AC: ..over most other people. But that rarely happens either, so that's to do with culture 'round here. I mean that's, y'know, I do...I've had lots of issues in Yorkshire and this region for, in their understanding of what conservation is if you like.

KL: Mmmm.

AC: Erm, I think I said to Henry Rumbold it was, it was a language not much spoken in this country, in this part a the country...conservation. But...and I think that's the truth, I mean there's a very much a restorative approach generally, in York particularly, but most a the masons are in the mould. Erm, but there are jobs where I feel we...y'know they should be using conservators, but there aren't many conservators. But that's historical, y'know, I trained an I worked in the southwest where there are lots, but that's for reasons of history and...that there are lots in that part a the world so that is very much more of a language that's, that's understood, and there are lots of builders who've adopted it because they've seen y'know by example if you like that they can do these wonderful jobs if they just show a bit of understanding. So, in some ways Somerset and 'round there, kinda show how that's achieved, there's sort of a ripple affect if you like...

KL: Mmm

AC: ...of, of firms all coming out of the Wells Cathedral project in the 70s and 80, early 80s, and then setting up and then there's lots of them, and then it becomes a culture and then...Veronica Miller, when I was down there was conservation officer in South Somerset, so you've got everything in place to kind of create this culture of more conservation aware work...

KL: Mmm

AC: And really that culture is completely absent in this area I think. Y'know, th, the it just doesn't exist. That's kinda, I hoped we might...y'know, that's what I wanted Richardtown to be, if you like. The start of that, something that might...

KL: The idea to replicate that, yeah...

AC: Um, but err, which is why we kind of embraced the training, y'know I was happy to do it, because I saw a lack, really, in this area. And y'know, I'm, my ego was quite happy to stand up and sort of mouth off about architects locally, but of course I had the confidence to do that because the diocese at that time were givin' me work, and they encouraged it, y'know, they weren't... Now acourse, with them, I'm the big bad wolf, so y'know, I'm a troublemaker. But they were quite happy for me to cause waves when I was on their side...

KL: When it suits...

AC: Yeah. But, that gave me the confidence to do that. So I have to be a bit more, err diplomatic these days, but erm so that's how we did all that. We did quite a lot you know, over the years, over the last 5 years, we've... And when the NHTG came along we were very much the only people really offering any skills training in North Yorkshire I think, but...erm and we're now, we're hopin' to set this thing up here. But that's just to keep that going really, as a...cos I st, I do see the need for it. Y'know, locally, an, my ideal is always that we just 'ave ordinary builders just doing things right again, y'know. Instead of...I don't really want it to be in the territory of conservators, and people like that. Y'know, I'd rather it was more dispersed. But its quite problematic getting that, and we found, y'know cos we were tryin' to target the training at tradesmen, that very, very few came, in truth on any of our...y'know, as a proportion of people that came on the training, most a them were, were not from the local building firms, y'know. Erm, we 'ad probably a better proportion on the one we did together...

SN: That was alright wasn't it? Quite good...

AC: Yeah, that was quite a good proportion, that was, but that was better than any we achieved before with the stuff we did for the diocese, or with the diocese, you know. Erm...

SN: Oh right.

AC: But, I mean there were always some...

SN: ..but we had a lot...

AC: I'm not sayin' there weren't, y'know, Firm16GB sent 7 on 1 of my lime things...

SN: Oh really?

AC: But then, as I say, all 7 of 'em wanted to come and work with me after that, and there as trouble... So... It was difficult, but 2 of 'em did.

KL: So do you, do you directly employ people then?

AC: Only 1. Only 1 at the moment. But actually, that was made possible by the fact that the diocese...you know, we 'ad a mixture of work. Some for the diocese, some... But there's Cliff who was here earlier, I mean he's now been...he's self employed but 'e works,'e's worked for me constantly for over a year, and so the tax man is gonna turn 'round shortly and say 'you need to employ 'im'.

KL: ...was gonna say...yeah.

AC: Which I'd be happy to do, but it does...the problem again is always going back to is cash flow, and the deal I've come to with all a them when they're workin' with me self employed is they don't get paid 'til I get paid. So that's it, I'm not payin', you know I can't pay them upfront.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

AC: And a lot a that goes back. I mean I had got to a point where I did have a y'know, a reserve of about 10 grand, but I lost all that at Gorton's, so that, being ripped off, knocked that out. So th...it's very difficult, so that's always been the deal with them I'm quite happy to get the work in, and y'know and do...service the work, and facilitate it if you like. Sometimes happier than other times, but y'know, sometimes it's a burden, but... As long as they have to just get paid when I do, y'know, and not before.

KL: Mmm

AC: Erm, that would change if I had to employ more people, that would become much more problematic, and maybe even impossible in truth. So I'd have to then shrink. I mean we have shrunk, from what we had when we were at the peak with the diocese, there were about 8 people, and probably about 10 people that woulda come and worked in Richardtown if they could've done...

KL: And still on the self employed basis...

AC: Yeah, but largely...

KL: ...sort of a loose...

AC: Yeah, yeah.

KL: Kind of, yeah.

AC: But it worked within that cradle, but I'm not saying that would be a model for anywhere else, cos it couldn't be really. But, I mean you could do it somewhere like Dearing House, an, if you did...if you just break it up. Roger was talking to me about this apprenticeship thing...

SN: Oh OK.

AC: Because you've got a meeting with 'em tomorrow haven't you?

SN: Yeah, I have yeah.

AC: But, but I've made it clear to Dearing House, for instance, that I, I would be very happy to facilitate any training for them, because it means I can work at Dearing House. I mean I love the place, and I, I'm quite happy to do that, so I think he'll mention that tomorrow. But, that's what he was sounding me out about...whether I'd, y'know whether this apprentice could work with me whenever I was workin' for them...

SN: Oh OK.

AC: Or even work with me other times if they haven't got...y'know, so 'e gets a better deal sorta thing.

SN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AC: Which I said yeah, but, but I've always, what I've always wanted to do with them was, if they could just get the money to do a big project, like, cos I priced like the pyramid for instance...

SN: Uh huh.

AC: The repair a that. That I'd be happy to work with their permanent crew on that...

SN: Yes, that would be amazing...

AC: You know, where we go in and upskill their guys, cos mostly what they're lacking is confidence...

SN: Uh huh

AC: It's not, y'know they're all willing. I get on very well with all the crew there. So, that's how I've always seen...I'm much happier, I'm very happy being a facilitator, and we're busy enough that I don't feel, and I, I, as I say, I did feel that with the diocese, but as it's turned out we're, we're even busier not workin' for the Diocese, and actually in truth it probably worked against us as far as finding work locally, because everybody around here hates the diocese, hates the Peverill Diocese, y'know, an including all the local gentry, so the fact that I'm not not so closely associated with them is...actually of benefit to them in a...

KL: Oh that's interesting

AC: ...a business terms, which was y'know maybe a surprise to me, but it became quite obvious a few years ago that that was the case, y'know.

KL: Mmmm

AC: And even Roger I was tal, when I was talkin' to 'im today was sayin' 'we...oh, so you don't work for them anymore'. Err and I said

Interruption

'well no I really don't think I ever will work for them again'. An 'e was, 'e was almost like

'oh thank..'. You know. 'E suddenly felt that 'e wasn't treading on their toes an...cos there's this sort of...when he has had me there he's often I think introduced me when we were doin' the boar, cleanin' the boar, 'e said to some guests 'he works for the Peverill Diocese really, we've just robbed him'. But I never did work for them...

SN: No, I know.

AC: ...directly. You know what I mean? But, but I was happy, when it seemed like everything was moving forward, even though there were lots of thing being lost, it always...there was still that forward trajectory that, y'know, you would compromise, you would 'ave to accept that that's been lost, cos you weren't there at the time, or whatever. Erm, I was happy to be associated with them but now I, I think...as I say, when English Heritage and people object, I can't be associated with what they're doing, in my opinion, that couldn't be more negative for me in the future.

KL: Mmm, mmm.

AC: Even though they're gonna go 'round, tryin', as they've been doin'...Reece who you met, I mean was tellin' people they don't use for from within a week of comin', arriving...you know that they don't use me any more. And there was...you know, so 'e's been damaging, or seeking to damage my reputation for the last 6 months, at the same time as David's saying that I'm a consultant and they do use me, and they want me to do this and they want me to do that. So it's a weird scenario, very stressful, you can imagine but we've just got on, and my feeling, if we get...we've been asked to price several major jobs, this year we'll find it difficult if we get them all to do them all...

SN: Right.

AC: ...I think. You know, it's, so from, from the business point of view I think next year is gonna be the busiest we've probably ever had. And this last year we thought we'd be, I kept promising ourselves that we'd slow down y'know, but actually we haven't. I mean we're, we're not as busy as we were...from, from the 30th of March last year it felt like you just couldn't take breath until the end of September I just didn't get time to breathe it felt like, y'know, cos we just, it was 3 jobs goin' at the same time, we were running around one, soon as we finished that on to the next, and it was almost imposs...it was very difficult copin' with it in truth. But erm, but then that's when again you hit this thing well do you expand, but then as soon as you do you can't...that's my problem, locally is that I can't actually trust, even people like Jack whose come from Firm16GB, unless I'm there I can't trust them to do what I want. Really, not to the level I want...

SN: But you could with Cliff?

AC: Just about, but 'e only just. Yeah, I can, yeah. I would say I can. But, but there are things that Cliff can't do, I mean 'e's not a stonemason...

SN: No.

AC: Y'know, and that sorta thing. Erm, Jack'll revert very quickly to usin' angle grinders to take out pointing. I mean 'e's been doing it at the Dentist's Office the last few weeks. An, and so you, yeah you f...it's difficult I think. I me...and I we did make compromises a, in quality I felt at the Dentist's Office, well not in quality but, cos they wouldn't pay for real plasterers and because we couldn't find anyone to plaster with lime, other than Firm01PI perhaps, who he wasn't

prepared to pay for most of the time, they did some. We had to teach ourselves, but I don't, didn't feel happy about it, d'you know what I mean?

KL: Mmmm

AC: I'd rather've had a very good plasterer. But that was the only way of getting' the job done, an actually it's worked fine, and we've upskilled a bit. But, but I'd rather that hadn't happened if you know what I mean. That we could've just had the craftsmen out there, but who is there in lime plastering terms?

SN: Firm01PI

AC: There's no-one, an that's the problem we have in this area, I still don't think that's been addressed, but I've had through our lime courses, I must've had 500 people in the last 5 yearas, but, and each one a them tends to go away feeling inspired, but then they've...but that's...there've been people who've come and then they've gone back to their firm sayin' 'well we've gotta stop putting cement in our mortars'. And they're just told

'you carry on putting that it'. Y'know, without mentioning any names of firms. But, but that's, that's the norm, you know, subverting a lime with white cement, in this area, with a lot a the firms, an... So you can, you can get people who see it, and I've had it with lots a people, an y'know Jamb's in err Leeds who, y'know people come to you like with a confession and say

'oh we realise...'. It's like St Paul on the road to Damascus sorta thing, and people will go away from that converted, and awar, suddenly aware that it's easy, and y'know it's not scary and actually it's a good thing for every which way, y'know, every which reason. But you've still got then, that's gotta be translated on the ground, and, I mean that first time I went to Vermont that was exactly it. I was told that this firm, Todd Kerslake, that they, by this idiot at LimeWorks USA that there was no-one in Vermont who knew how to use lime. No-one who...like a waste land an all a this. And I went 'round to Todd Kerslake's house with the architect, the first time I was there, an there's Todd and 'e's got all these sands, and 'e's got all these different sands, wi...sharp sands. An 'e's sayin'

'this is the one we use for this'. An then 'e's got all this lime that 'e's slaked, and 'e's got everthing, and it, and they were slaking their own lime, they were doing things that no-one's been doing here for 30 years or more. The only thing 'e was doing was puttin' a bit a white, bit a cement in.

SN: OK.

AC: But apart from that, an all I did by goin' there was give information not to put the cement in anymore. Cos 'e was just doing it cos 'e was afraid if...cos in Vermont most a the buildings are wood, so 'is main business was chimneys, so 'e was puttin' a bit a cement in cos 'e didn't want to 'ave to go back, an do them again. Cos 'e' didn't quite believe that... But that was easy, it was easy to get them to see... Cos they're still usin' the right sands, there's, y'know, there's not been the same rupture of craft tradition. It's just that they are puttin' a cement in, but as soon as you give 'em, as I say, they stop, and that's it, an that's all they need to do, in fact. It's much harder in this country, erm, I feel,

y'know, generally speakin'. But there are lots, we meet 'em 'round here, cos there are craftsmen here who come. They know, they know they shouldn't be putt...they remember that their dad didn't put cement in, but they do, cos people do, an... Y'know what I mean? It's, it's, it's all in their head, that's what I've always felt, it's just a bit of, it's persuading people to think a bit differently. That's what I've always felt about skills training really, y'know, plasterers plaster they just need to believe they can plaster with lime, an just learn a few little things they 'ave to do differently, but generally speakin' it's the same skill.

SN: Uh huh.

AC: Erm, so that's what we're hoping we can do something towards here, but a lot of it will be peripatetic, that's the idea. Erm, and I just want to set out as I did in that thing...

SN: Yeah.

AC: ...just this pattern of building. So set out, say 'well this is the pattern a building. In this area, traditionally, we can show you how you do each of these things hopefully'. Y'know, 'and then you can apply them'. And hopefully we will get erm local builders and people doing that, and then showing respect for these roofs and the patterns of roofing, and that sort of stuff.

SN: Uh huh

AC: And seeing that, that's easy, but...but I don't feel very optimistic I have to admit, at the moment really. Is what I think, really...

SN: I don't wanna leave it quite there, on such a desolate note. We are gonna leave you in a second cos I'm aware we like eating into your evening.

KL: Yeah.

SN: There's only 2 questions really that I wanted to ask you. One was a bit about materials, and where you kind of source them from, cos we're tryin' to think about how, y'know...

AC: Yeah.

SN: ...craftwork, craftsmanship has economic benefits outside the company itself. And the other thing is a bit about motivation, and if you leave that 'til last then we can hopefully lift it up a bit.

KL: Haha

AC: Right. Well I mean my ideal, and that's, I mean when I always...cos I've talked a lot. I've done lots of lectures about Richardtown and stuff, cos we've learnt a lot there, there's no question, because for various reasons a lot survives there that maybe doesn't elsewhere. But, y'know, there's that painting of Richardtown in 1730...

SN: Mmmm

AC: ...which is a wonderful colour pain...well it's there behind you. That's part of it anyway.

KL: Oh right.

AC: But I show that, an, and just make the point that at that time everything that you see there is built with materials that 'ave come from a mile radius of the town. An, it, y'know, you can see the brickworks there, and there was a quarry, and there's all, and the thatch is from the river, an, an I really...

KL: It's amazing really, yeah.

AC: And I don't see that that is unrealistic now actually. It shouldn't be rea...unrealistic. That is sustainable building. That's what that was. That was utterly sustainable. But we're in, but the general building industry obviously is geared to standardisation and all a these things, and if that is what makes things acceptable, and we've been there with the lime, Building Limes Forum, where they're tryin' to get everything to British standards, standardization. An this is the Earth Building UK, the conference we 'ad there, every...you got this tension, but half the delegates are there tryin' to say 'well we've got to get mud accepted so, here we are, we're down in Cornwall and we're making clay that you can buy, and it's always the same, and you can use it anywhere, and it always works, and that's how we get people to start using mud', an... Whereas me and Brad are there sayin'

'Actually look. The evidence of these buildings, which are all full of mud plasters', and this one will be too, in this area generally, but probably a lot a the country in the past. All they're doing is diggin' the mud from the garden. Y, I mean that's it. An it's there, an it's dead easy an... The frightening...sorry, this 'as distracted me. The frightenin' thing on Saturday was, that we 'ad all these mud builders, experts, in theory, who were on the committee of EBUK, and all me an Brad an Wilf did was mix up some mud plaster and put in a thing, and was, they were goin'

'Wow! What, you mean you just...and that...'. And you think

'well how come you're the experts, if you, you're excited by us just knockin' a bit of mud together that we've...off the buildin' site where we 'ad the conference an...makin' a plaster with it'. But, that was a bit scary really, but, but that I...to me that's again what we ought to, could've achieved in Richardtown. That's what I was lookin' to achieve, is that idea that these buildin' materials can be sourced immediately locally, and that would engender a local busin...industry that's facil... Cos that's all missing isn't it? I mean we've not got brick makers nearby, we've not...we have relatively in this part a the country luckily, but, but that's what we should be aiming to achieve, and that creates a whole network... There's, the craftsmen using those materials, but, y'know, all those materials are coming locally, and lime being made locally, and burnt locally, and as it used to be... And one thing we did demonstrate at the Dentist's Office was that y'know, a little lime kiln that you build yourself on a project is actually economic. You can produce lime economically in that, because again most of it has become a product...I mean there was that Neil Mayer at the conference who's very good, but 'e's sayin' there's no such thing as a sustainable material, there's only a sustainable product, and that's the problem at the moment. That all these things are being made into products.

SN: Ooooook.

AC: When in fact the materials are just here and there, all around us, and that that's the essence, certainly for what we do, as historic buildings, the essence is that all these materials were local.

SN: Yeah.

AC: And that's what gives them the character. And yet we're supposedly conserving them like-for-like but using all these products.

KL: Yeah

AC: That are not...that bear very little resemblance except that they don't do any harm perhaps, y'know, very pure lime an all this sorta stuff. So, yeah, we would like to set, to some extent to produce products here if you like, to a limited extent, but y'know, actually a sort of fairly typical earth mortar if you like, for this area. That's what it has to be. Not to send it across the country, but just so a builder who comes across, can, has the opportunity to come and buy a product, if you like, but which is specific, locally specific, and in that tradition that they have access to that. It wouldn't be us tryin' to make money out of it as such, but just being able to supply. And similarly, if we can build a lime kiln or get access to one locally, then burning lime with the local limestone and selling that as well, so people can actually produce something authentic. Erm, so those networks, yeah. And I mean Wilf's very good about that if you wanted to chat to Wilf, but that's what 'e was, he was arguin' that, that you build networks of craftsmen who can help one another locally, and have the access to the materials locally, but you... But it is all local. Y'know, and I don't...that gets presented as bein' pretty reactionary. I don't believe it is, I think that's quite revolutionary in many ways. Y'know, that idea that...cos why, why is it uneconomic to do that? D'you know what I mean? All these places are here, and we managed to get the quarry re-opened in Richardtown. And that's what was driving me, that idea, 'well look'... Apart from the fact that we needed that stone because there is no other source of that particular stone, and there are so many buildings built of it, but again the diocese 'ave not delivered on it, y'know. We fought long an hard to get the quarry open, against all this local opposition that you get every time you do, and then 3-years on they still 'aven't opened it, and... And yet they're repairing the buildings that needed that stone with the wrong stone. And you think 'oh God', y'know... Which they're bringing miles to, y'know, and so... That all needs to be thought through in a holistic way, and craftsmanship and what we do has got a role to play in that I think. Equally I believe that these traditional buildings are generally sustainable anyway, y'know what I mean, this...that's, the Green Deal an all this sort a stuff is a real threat to these buildings isn't it? And so that's, I hope we can input into that debate as well, by doing what we do here and showing breathable insulation materials and that sort a stuff. Because otherwise it's a disaster, but, but again when I started thinkin' about that, I registered the domain name sustainabletraditionalbuildings.com and I was just amazed that it was available because...but there's obviously no-one thinking along those lines....

SN: No...

AC: ...that actually traditional buildings are sustainable buildings. D'you know what I mean? And actually most sustainable buildings just need to go back to building the way that these buildings were built rather than....which obviously most earth buildings, and straw, they are, think walls an...But, so, yeah, there's that tension as I say in EBUK, clearly, and it's one that's been worked through in the Building Limes Forum, erm... Where they're tryin' to take on new build an modern building technology on its own terms, rather than setting their, our own agenda, which is that these things should be accessible to people, and, local people should be able to do this stuff themselves, you know what I mean? If they, with a bit of education or a bit of showing, you know, that these things aren't something that

should be just in the hands of big business really. There was a very scary guy, ClayWorks, at this conference, but it was a very scary talk cos it was like 'e'd been to some American mo, motivational speaker, an 'e, 'e was showin' pictures from 'is past when 'e was a cob builder, and 'e 'ad like dreadlocks and everything, and suddenly 'e's in a suit, an 'e was all like business talk an 'we are going to market this material, and we are gonna do this, and we are gonna do...'. It was really weird cos it felt like 'e was a robot, 'e'd been taken over by something...

KL: Haha.

AC: Erm, but that's the way 'e's chosen to go. I'd rather go the opposi...y'know it's about localism, but in a, not in a reactionary conservative kind of a way, but just more... Anyway, so that's that. I spose. Well, as far as motivation, I don't know really what motivates people to... I'm motivated to work on old buildings cos I think they just...they are the document of people like me, and others, like all of us, before. In solid form. And, y'know, they hold, they hold all that history, an hopes an dreams of people that, an most...the document of ordinary people doesn't exist.

SN: Mmm.

AC: That these buildings are it, in some way. So I, I get delight outta workin' with them, and I get delight on seeing the sort of bodes and things that people used to do. And get away with, cos they were using breathable materials they weren't doin' any damage, but erm... And I get stimulated by thinkin' about them, and their history and evolution and all that sort of stuff. So I find it stimulatn', a lot of other people do too, and I, but if, that's a way of lookin' at your job that's different than most...

SN: Yeah.

AC: One a the comments we get quite often when we've done training, when we've had tradesmen on the jobs, is 'blimey, it's...'. I mean there was one recently on the lime unit, 'e was just sayin' 'blimey, actually, it's just so rare to find people who enjoy their job...these days. Or enjoy what they're doing'.

SN: Really.

AC: An 'e was a builder.

SN: Yeah.

AC: So, my problem with a lot of it is, is that I think that so much of what we do is conditioned by the society and the nature of the building industry, which is inherently cut throat and about suppressing people. That's what I was talkin' about earlier...suppressing people's creativity, and suppressing people's interest, or the idea that they've gotta sit into a box and that's it, you don't rise above it. Whereas I just like to see people rising and moving and fall... You know what I mean? That all a this should be a team effort, and that people have a non hierarchical sort of engagement with a project that is some...or with a building, and people get a lot of motivation out of... Y'know, people've always come away from the Dentist's Office for instance, when they've worked on it, and an awful lot of the work's been done by people on courses in the end, feelin' they've contributed something to something important.

SN: Mmm

AC: And they take that away with them, and they've gotta stake in that building, because they've done something. Erm, and that really does motivate. That does motivate. I mean people go away excited very often, or inspired by

different things. And, and the history of the building, if you tell it to people, if you work it out, inspires them as much as the other. You know what I mean? It's, it's sort of a total package if you like, that people... So I encouraged everyone that works with us to, y'know, to read about the things, to, to try and understand the building, y'know generally speaking.

SN: Uh huh

AC: And to, to engage with it on that level as well as on the skills level, you know. And that in itself tends to motivate people. I, as I say though, I find it difficult cos so much of the time and in so much of the industry, in so much of our society in truth, that's, that is knocked out.... Y'know, you're not allowed to think like that, you're not allowed to be those things. You're not allowed to think, that's the architect's job, or that's the surveyor's job, and your job is just, as they are on the Dog and Duck, to do as you're told. Never mind what it is you're told. Just do it. Cos otherwise you're gonna lose your job. And that's unfortunate, you know. Erm, I mean Uri, who used to work with me, was working on St Olaf's for a big contractor there, and I mean it was like they had a quota of people to sack every day, on the site. Y'know, so if you happened to be caught not moving the moment the guy came 'round the corner, off the job, straightaway. And that, that's just now way to achieve anything good for a building, or for the people who are doing the work, y'know.

SN: Mmmm

AC: Ummm, so we still got a major mountain to climb I feel.

KL: You know that up that you were looking for to finish on...?

AC: I'm sorry, I haven't given it to you...

KL: We've come down again.

AC: Well, I do think, sorry yeah, but I do think there is a major mountain because, I mean, I took reassurance...and I mean this is a very biased position, but from William Morris and reading a little thing he wrote, but basically, addressed to SPAB in 1877, the SPAB Committee saying 'look' y'know, 'we know if there's money involved we can't win. We can't save a building. But that doesn't mean we compromise, and that doesn't mean we don't try. And there will be some buildings we can save'. But then, what struck me there, and obviously 'e was a socialist, and all that, was that he saw SPAB very much, which I hadn't appreciated, and this is not necessarily for inclusion in your thing... I hadn't appreciated that he felt that the role of SPAB was to save what historic buildings could be saved, until the revolution came. Cos after the revolution people would value these buildings and value what they contained, which is the dead labour of all these people, and all the hopes and dreams of people, in a very real way, an the, y'know, the crappy little building would be valued and not just seen as something to wipe away and build a, well not in his day, but y'know, a tower block on or whatever. That that's the value, the value is there, and that's, that's why SPAB, still today, although they've left behind a lot a that, is this focus on historic fabric. That's the important thing. You keep the fabric, cos it, we can't second-guess...and that's what the diocese is proving themselves, in this context, to be so bad at. They're sayin'

'so what? We need to do this with them'. You know, it doesn't matter, their idea that you focus on the fabric because it contains so much that can never be won again. It'll never come back, once it's gone, it's gone. That it actually has with it all these efforts and all these failures and flaws, y'know like Ruskin, I love that quote about y'know, 'failure after failure, and that's what makes us human'. But that, in the context of buildings, that's true. But, y'know, but, we're not machines, y'know. So, I don't know. It's not an up or anything really...

SN: It's level isn't it so...let's leave it there. Thank you so much.

Fred Price, Firm11SM. January 22nd 2011

SN: Well we've been erm....I'll start by sayin' the date. So it's the 22nd of January isn't it, or is it the 23rd?

KL: 23rd.

SN: 23rd of January, erm and it's Sophie Norton and Kim Loader talking to Fr..Fred Price, sorry. And we together...you know that I have an interest in conservation and craftsmanship, and ow erm kind of craftsmen relate to the supply chain in conservation.

FP: Mmmm.

SN: Erm, and Kim is very interested in small medium sized enterprises and the public sector

FP: Mmmm

SN: She's from the management school. So we're kind of working together to interview a collection of people from around Yorkshire, just to find out more about how erm you work within that sort of supply chain culture, the...kind of relate to the conservation industry. How you grow your business, work your business, how you train people, take on apprentices, erm the practices your use. So we've just started off really by asking most people how they came to be where they are, like what their experiences are and how you came to be y'know a master mason.

FP: I mean to start really I been trained in Bulgaria as, as a mason. My father's a sculptor, my brother's a stone mason, my uncle's a stone mason, my grandfather was an artist sculptor, so there it was like in the family, so I grew up in some of the stone workshops. I didn't want to become a stone mason I have to say, I wanted to become something with wood carving or joiner or something other... Bulgaria didn't work this way, you had to do what they offered. So I did this start and then I just went on a journey, learnt allover, I mean Switzerland, Denmark, worked in lots of different workshops, probably 12. And it brought me over to also Wells cathedral, so did Wells Cathedral for a year and then I applied probably to 25 different workshops in the UK, from the stone dictionary, from the Stone Federation, to find somewhere in the north, and in this *muffled* there was also Callum John...

SN: Mmmm

KL: ...up in, in York. And he answered back like within days, phoned me saying 'please come'. Or the things is somebody left, two people left just overnight. Decided to travel through Africa. So they left and he wanted to do some millennium project at this time for some rich, big houses, whatever...fireplaces. So I started immediately there, so I went there for like literally just half a year, a year, when I came I didn't know even who Dick Reid is or where York was. I had to find it on the map. Why I just go....like I didn't know geographically England so well, been in the south for like the cathedrals. So I went to York and well stayed here for 5 years with Dick, and developed. And after this...or in this time I did also my SPAB fellowship with the SPAB, and I went over to Bulgaria, went back to do my masters over there. So you don't become just master, call yourself a master. You have to do like a degree in Bulgaria so you have a license to run a business, so literally you have a license to train apprentices, so you, you have to do 8 months just training, I mean teaching certificates like what you do here. It's like you learn the basics of human beings, and how they behave, and kinds, what they do when they're 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, so all of this. Tax law, management, how to run a business, whatever. I mean all basics, structural engineering, and then obviously the biggest part is, is, is your

subject. And you go into all the other parts with different trades, like butchers, bakers, hairdressers, mechanics, this is like in school, doing with them tax law.

SN: Mmmm.

FP: So apply to small enterprise business. So, and the strange thing is I can't apply this to England. First of all this was 15 years ago...

SN: Uh huh

FP:And German law, so it's completely...I mean you understand the basic how things work, or, but still you have to retrain to, to understand the English system. But this is how I came to York. And in Callum John's workshop I met my wife, she's a wood carver. So I wanted to leave, I wanted to go somewhere else, I wanted to go to Scotland or I don't know... I applied to China, I wanted to work in China, a carving studio in America, loads of ideas. Now I've stayed, and I met my wife, and we've set up a small business...Callum said he wanted to close, and he did. So I left probably a year before he closed. And set up like this business. And there was a couple of architects, the...it's trust thing, it's like...it's not just who you know, you have to be trusted. So some of the architects give me small jobs, or there again I work this way, this... I knew a German stone mason who trained as a architect and he did a in internship with the architect, so he said 'try, work with Fred, talk to him'...so Bellamy's, Evan Garret given me like the first £500 job, or £10,000 job, £5,000 job... I mean tendering, it wasn't like he given me....or he would recommend me to some church. He'd say

'talk to this young lad here, he know what he is doing'. Then from there is just became bigger and bigger. I mean we did £30,000 jobs and then we did £100,000 jobs, and now we're doing £300,000 jobs. I mean it's just, over the last 8, 9 years it just grow into this... And in the beginning I couldn't find any good masons. They....I mean they'd been around or they'd all been set already in businesses, and when I set up I couldn't pay them higher wages then they got.

SN: Mmm

FP: So I couldn't. And I couldn't give them like the opportunity to go like to a good workshop, I mean I couldn't set it up. I mean I didn't have enough money to set something up at this time. I mean I couldn't buy a drill, I didn't have enough money to do anything. Or a van, I couldn't buy a van. So I borrowed or hired it all. And, had like German friends coming over, German master masons, and journey men, and they always worked with me and helped me. And so *muffled* I thought 'well we have to employ somebody and train somebody', and I mean James came along, Rob came along, then Heath. I mean that's....loads of people applied, though I, I find it very difficult to find somebody who is very passionate about it. It's a very long process to figure out...and then I, I teach also in the York College, so I saw loads of students. And I have to say, from 20 students you had maybe 5 they really wanted to be there. The other ones they just, they would come late, they would go early for their tea break, come late. Early to their lunch break, and late. So they would spend maybe 2-hours in the workshop, and I would be there and there would be a couple of guys they would come early, they stay through their lunch break, and they wanted to learn. And one of them was Dom Sargent, who's now the foreman...

SN: Uh huh

FP: And Kieran Holmes, he was like one of the trainees, he, he just...and he would go always for the challenging thing. He would to me and ask me, 'how I could make it better, or how I can make this harder for myself?'. And I say

'well do a ball with a round foundation in a very hard limestone'. So Dom Sargent would take the hardest stone, and he would take the challenge, he would do it. And all the other kids they wouldn't. So I knew, I mean there's in Birmingham there's a couple of good kids... I knew, at this point I knew who was good.

SN: Mmmm.

FP: I mean I still know, why I know Harry Charles quite well.

SN: Right.

FP: It's the best way really to train your own. And then, then you have your own input and this is how it works at the moment with, I mean, what we do.

SN: So is everybody that works for you now been an apprentice with you?

FP: Not everybody. I mean Tim isn't, and Dom wasn't. Dom was trained by Firm16GB...

SN: Right.

FP: ...by Firm16GB. And I put like a job advert in why Noel for desperate for some masons. And he applied, and obviously, with no doubt I just took him. I mean, there was a couple of other people I didn't know, but Dom as I know him from the college.....I mean keen. There something, when people want to do something, you can just see it, you know. And they fit in. It's very, it's a very difficult scenario...I mean I'm just trying to get a new apprentice now from February, and he's 18, and he came over for a week. He's so desperate and the question he ask, and talking to the other guys, and the college say he's very weird. And I say 'why is he weird, I don't wanna employ somebody who's weird. Why is he weird?'

'He's coming early and he stays longer, and he wants to work through his breaks'. So he perfect, he fits.

SN: Hahaha

FP: So, so I mean, this is the weird people I want. I mean they, they love what they do. I mean, it's common sense. When you love what you do, you get paid for what they love to do. So it's not... And they you do also some sacrifice...I mean obviously I don't have to say money wise it's perfect, it isn't. It's up and down. I mean last 2-years have been really bad money wise, I don't, don't need to be rich. It's like, I love old buildings and I work on them, so... And, these kids they work for me. They come and go but they all have a passion. To work on old buildings, so... I mean it's also money, it's err not not...

SN: Yeah.

FP: ...it's probably second...it's not...otherwise you wouldn't do it.

SN: Why, why do you think they like working on older buildings rather than new build?

FP: Why? It's history isn't it?

SN: Is that it? There's nothing else, like...? I mean I know its...heritage...

FP: It's heritage...it's....also something....I mean you get something back from it don't you? You can go on an old building what's 800 years old... I mean I, I feel this way.

SN: Uh huh.

FP: When I take a stone out of a building what's 800 years old, and I see the tool marks inside and I think 800 years ago a stonemason chiseled them out.

SN: ...and nobody's seen it before...

FP: And nobody's seen it since, and then you take it out and...some people...as I said before, we have jobs where they say '250 stones come out'. I could price 350 stones, I could take them out and I could pay for them, and job done. Or I go down, I argue maybe 400 stones less.

SN: Mmmm

FP: They just look at me and say 'are you crazy?'

SN: Hahaha

FP: Why, why.... Or I want to keep, when I can, some old stones in, and this is how I train my guys. And in the end, when you have a contract like this, they will divert this 100 stones to something else. It's not like you lose the money. You do just something what's more urgent...

SN: Yeah.

FP: ...so, so it's not...I mean, maybe sometimes they give it to a glazier or...so I don't get the money in the end. It doesn't matter really, when I do less work. Can do something else. It's not...

SN: Haha.

FP: This is, I think this the difference, what I see with firms I did work for, and also what I heard from other firms around, when I mean... I have a lot of people coming and want to work for us, so I don't take anybody on at the moment so... And they would say 'it's all money, it's all just pinching this, pinching this, and extra there, and extra there', just... I don't know, it's, it's, I think it's the thing...you can go somewhere where nobody 'as been....I mean new build is the same probably, when you build something completely new, when you build a nice big house...

SN: Mmmm

FP: Big staircase. I mean we build loads of new staircases in houses, and new stuff. It's also nice. I think....I mean we did this cosmati floor, it was 1268. I mean to lay of this floor, where all the kings and queens of Britain been crowned, I mean, whatever anybody says it's... I mean when you lay there and take your templates and you think, 'yeah like...', I don't know how many kings and queens you have, 30 or 40, and they've all been sitting there and been crowned, and you lay on the same floor as them. It's something....you can't, not everybody can do...

SN: No.

FP: ...so, and I think this is... And, and I see out of my eye often, I mean they're taking photos I mean like little ones, up and show on this... They're always taking photos, be very proud of what they do. So they be going home and

showing their girlfriends or wives or partners and showing what they do...or their friends. Or they sending text message to their mothers. I mean sometimes I think it's very sweet, their so proud of it.

SN: Yeah.

FP: And it's really nice to see it, so... I, I, I can't....I 'ave to think about it, I can probably give you a better answer or...

It's, it's to be part of something, part of the history and the chain...

KL: Mmmm.

FP: The long chain of maintenance of a building. I mean we don't build this church, I mean this one porch we took down and built up again, or... We didn't make the whole porch. I mean we woulda made it, it still woulda been... I we put like this, this other thing. We put in every job we do, we put a date in. We make a stone, every stonemason has a mason mark, we put the mark in, put the stone somewhere in the building, and nobody see it, only when you know about this. A building is so big, it's thousands of stones, and when I don't point in one direction and say 'on this stone there's a little...' And nobody will see it. The only person who will see it again is the mason who go up there in 50 years in 100 years... He will say

'ahhh yeah. 2011, 11 masons marks, so it must be a team of 11, 6 or 5'. So they always proud, and I try to in, involve them also. I, I never say it's me. I mean I'm sitting here now talking to you in a way, that's why I wanted them to be here. Why it's not me. I mean can make 150 stones. I can make maybe 10 or 15, and I mean the rest is done.

SN: Mmm

FP: So I'm, I'm running around organising all the paperwork, and do the VAT return and all the stuff nobody wants to do, so...

SN: Yeah.

FP: You have other question?

SN: Hahaha. That's interesting though. Erm, I don't know... Kim, any questions?

KL: You said you had done some new build?

FP: Yeah.

KL: Yeah. But, do you still do any new, or is it mainly now all...

FP: I mean when it's new it's most of the time on old buildings. Additions to old buildings. It's never...

KL: Oh OK.

FP: ...new new. I mean we did, we do like for the Catholic church a fair bit, so we do altars and new furniture...

KL: Right

FP: ...out of stone.

KL: Uh huh

FP: And there was in Middlesborough a new church they built, and we did enormous table out of stone. So we designed it, and made models for it, and....then again it was also something so unique that the guys been....it was a

challenge. Was not to, to make it was the challenge, it was the challenge to get like this whatever, 3, 4 ton block through a glass door with underfloor heating, up some stairs and fix it there.

KL: Mmmm

FP: So there was more the challenge to think about how to do it, and this is the other is, what I try to do it, I don't want people to be not paid for thinking. They all be paid to use their brain. So then when I go on site, I explain to everybody who goes on the site, obviously I been there, I set it up, I, I, I seen the drawings, I met the client....and then I come back I tell them, I show them the drawings say 'this is what we do today. Can you pack for it?'. I don't want their wife there, and

'I forgot a piece of wood or...' a drill, or a piece of slate, or have to be slipped under, or a soft mould when we need something. So you literally have to be in your head. You have to think how you fix something, how you get there, how you get it in, when you have like a long path you need a wheel barrow, you don't want to carry everything, so when you forget the wheelbarrow everybody have to walk down, so when you forget the wheelbarrow, I mean you can't point at me and say

'well you didn't tell me to bring the wheel...'. I say

'was a long path, why didn't you put it in?'. So there's no, so they all have to think by themselves.

SN: Yeah.

FP: And, at this work quite well in a small firm. And a big firm, you can hide a little bit. Here you can't, so they all have to perform quite well. So when Heath did a mistake out there today, I mean he can't hide it. Why I stay next to him and carve the letter. I mean I'm not always here, I doing a far bit now... And I don't see it, Dom'll see it, or somebody else. So you can't just pretend it not happen...

SN: Mmm.

FP: So I mean, I don't want say they do make all the time mistakes, but when there's a mistake they have to, can't they can't jut skip it.

SN: Do you think they like that though? Do you think they like being challenged, and having that, you know, responsibility?

FP: I think so. I think so. I think, when you think of craftspeople, they, they like a challenge. I mean it's not...when we do, like a straightforward job for me is taking out 100 stones and pointing a tower up, a church tower, and putting some copings up. I find that boring.

SN: Haha.

FP: Like, I've done this maybe 40, 50 times.

SN: Uh huh.

FP: And the church wardens, they sold for the last 3-years cookies and jam jars, and for them it's the most exciting thing when they come. And I make them very excited, I talk to them and say to them why we do it. And Rob is very good, I say Tom, you talk to the church warden for 2-hours and make them very happy, what we do, what lime mortar... So they going back to congregation and everybody's happy. Most builders, or most contractors, I don't say names, or you know other people, they don't do this, and, and I, I know from architects, there's contractors even telling clients off or arguing with them. I never, client always get what they ask for. I mean my guys sometimes say 'why you do this, why you do this, why you do this?'. I mean we, we broke a window in a church and the glazers didn't show up, and fixed it, and there was a wedding, and it was a Friday, and the church phoned up and say

'you have to fix it'. And so I phoned around, and so I go there myself and fix it. And they just say

'the glazer didn't care, why you care?'. I mean, er er er, of course I care, I mean, when there's a wedding and we broke the glass and the glazer didn't care, I mean, it's when you have to care. So we fixed it, I mean I didn't fix it. Some of my guys went down and put the glass in, so we got it. Or this is what a lot of people don't do, and people they're struggling a little bit more.

SN: Uh huh.

FP: I mean Firm16SM, Firm16SM had an, said it before, they went really for the big contracts. For the big government tax payer contracts, like millions, 28 million whatever.

SN: Mmmm.

FP: And most of them run out, there's no more money. And so they struggling, and they completely said 'oh, I do a job for £50, £90'. I mean it cost me more to go there and talk to them, or they will remember. And FirmGB16 will go there, and they don't even go there. They answer the phone and say 'pointing up a little bit of tracery? Ask somebody else'.

And now they go.

SN: Oh really.

KL: Oh, goodness.

FP: Uh huh. So, they changed. So they aren't very busy and, and I know from architects that *muffled* they been ridiculously more expensive than everybody was like 200,000, they would've been like 4, 500,000. People just would say 'there's no point to ask them anymore'. So all this small contracts, they wouldn't ask FirmGB16 anymore, and now they try to get their feet again, so they're buying the jobs....they're not buying, they're going in really cheap.

SN: Mmmm.

FP: So they now sometimes cheaper than me. Well this surprising....

SN: Yeah.

FP: ...so how they could do it. Or they do it, are they just do it probably to get back in this whole game, and it takes along time. It's not erm a short run, I mean crafts businesses you can't, you can't have a short-term idea. It's always long term I think.

SN: Yeah.

FP: You do a bad job on one job, I mean you're out of the game, you have to be always consistent in a certain price bracket. You can't....I mean sometimes my architect says 'ahh Fred, you can charge a little bit more, and then I charge a bit more and I don't get the job! So, so, I charge what I have to charge, what it cost. And stop. And everybody wins, and everybody comes here with a bicycle and I give them the same price like as if they come with a Porsche. I mean why should charge somebody else more? I don't want to be ripped off if I bring my car in the garage, I don't. So I don't charge people what they have. I mean the price I give is the price, so it's... And this is also what I say now to you I say to my guys.

SN: Uh huh.

FP: So my guys, they not involved in pricing but they know pretty much what I charge, or how I charge. I mean they know they bulk some, or they know what I charge an hour or... It's very open and transparent.

SN: Mmm.

FP: It's probably me coming from Bulgaria, communist country.

SN: Mmmm maybe yeah. But even Dom doesn't get involved in pricing?

FP: He is.

SN: Oh he is.

FP: He is. I mean he comes along, or then....he, he again knows the bulk figure. I would say to him 'what do you think? How long the stone will take, or this will take?'. And then he will say, and he know what I charge an hour, so it will be roughly 4, 5,000 and he say 'yeah, that's mmm...'. And do he knows, and he goes also to all the site meetings, so he sit there and he knows all the figures and he gets all the breakdown, so he sees the figures. All the other guys don't. I mean there's some funny occasions when church wardens would give like £60,000 cheques to one of my guys to handover to me, without envelope so....a little bit unprofessional. And then they think well I raking it in, or... I get like the bills from whatever, the quarry, the scaffolder...

SN: Yeah.

FP: And nothing's left from the 60,000. Or doesn't matter, or it's, it's err a little bit different I have to say in Bulgaria, it's far more loose in England, how business in this be done. Like tendering process, in Bulgaria is completely open. Here you send your envelope in, and your architect can open it, and whatever he does behind his door, so he can phone me up and say 'Fred, can you do it a bit cheaper?'. And I send him other, err other number...I could, I didn't say I did. It could happen, so in, it could happen with anybody. So, so, in a way, in Bulgaria, you sit like on the table and everybody sit in a room, and they open in front of you with a neutral person, even *muffled* So they, it would be very open and they would say from the beginning not the cheapest get it, the second or the third get it. So...

SN: Really?

FP: So, so from this point you wouldn't price it. I mean when I want to get the job I just give the cheapest price, I buy it. So anybody can buy a job. It's easy to buy a job. So when th, when...just recently there was a price for Selby Abbey...

SN: Mmmm.

FP: So, somebody else priced it cheaper, and I priced it very sharp, but I mean it's a good project in the area, so I priced it very sharp and I was second. And the person who got it must have priced it even sharper. Or again, it's to get it like this cheap, is easy. I mean I wouldn't take more money off. I wouldn't buy it in or... These people bought it in, so they probably bought it in for zero, they don't make any profit, they just do it to put it on their reference, and I think that shouldn't be allowed. I think they should protect good craftspeople. And it's in the interest of any... I mean English Heritage, National Trust, and architects, in their interest to have good quality.

SN: Mmmm.

FP: It's not, I mean, but they always go for the cheapest in this country, always.

KL: The cheapest such that the quality is less you mean? Cos you could say...

FP: Not necessarily...

KL: ...they're all the same quality but one's cheaper, and they all reach a...

FP: I mean from an architect's point, what they would say now to you, the architect would say 'I just ask people, they capable of doing this job'.

KL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

FP: So they would go through this, and there's now, there's a different new scenario now with the lottery fund money, can explain in a minute. Or, they would say 'we have like 3 or 4 people we ask...'

KL: Mmmm

FP: ...'and then all of these people be capable of doing the job'...

KL: Uh huh.

FP: 'and the most competitive one gets it'.

KL: Uh huh.

FP: So, who, whoever it is. Anyway...there should be alarm bells sometimes, when it's so cheap. They should question it, and sometimes they go back and.... And now, there is a new, I mean very simple scenario, they have to advertise it nationwide, certain jobs, even international, so there's like even Indian firms applying for a job in Ossett. I mean, really, for this tracery window, there was an Indian firm, they wanted to do this window or... Luckily the architect talked them out of it. Erm, and there is like agency, they have like a point system...I don't know you know about this, all this...

SN: Yeah, no I know a bit about this...

FP: So in a way I apply not directly to an architect. The architect puts this on the web, in the newspapers, send me an e-mail saying me, with 5, 6 employees, and not having loads of people in the office...

SN: Mmm.

FP: Will do very badly. Why I don't write them this huge paper pack, what they looking for. I mean, when they say 'who does quality control?'. I mean I do quality control, and John, and that's it. I don't...don't write 3 pages of quality control mechanisms in my firm. I mean I can, and I have like all this health and safety, CDM regulations I have to write anyway. It's, it's gobbledegook, I don't, I don't, I don't do this, and I, I talk to English Heritage about it to say I always

will lose, I mean they all have CSCS cards, I have apprentices, I have training in place, I have like the health and safety.... So you get a point system. So some of the jobs, the architect want me on

SN: Mmmm

FP: ...or the agency don't give me enough points so I'm even on the tender list, so I'm not selected. And some of the architects, they do all of this, and then they send me anyway, the tender pack. Also when I don't get the points, so there's maybe more people on the list. That's what I mean, it's a bit wishy washy I think. It's not, it's not really monitored or controlled. So some architects going this way. I mean I, I'm on a couple of jobs now where I know the architects really would like me on the tender list, so they probably made it clear to this agency that 'whatever points he have, get him on. We pretty sure he have. I mean, I have to send like my last three year bank statements, all of this...'

SN: Yeah.

FP: I mean it's fine, I'm happy to do so, it's...

KL: Is this for all types of clients...

FP: No.

KL: ...or any particular clients?

FP: No it's most of the time it's lottery fund. And it's, it's, it's like...

KL: Right.

FP: For English Heritage, when they giving money.

KL: Uh huh?

SN: So if it's lottery fund, is it normally like a public sector client? Like a council?

FP: Mmm. I mean, council, it's also schools sometimes or...it's councils or... I, I, I try to stay away from this. I don't... I mean, we busy enough. We being asked by private clients all the time, and, and, and most of the architects I work with, probably 4 or 5 architects, and each of them look after probably 100, 150 churches. 600 churches...they send a year 5 tenders for churches, and I get 20 tenders. And I used to get whatever I wanted, and now it's getting very competitive. And also I have to say I probably get a bit more expensive.

SN: Mmm.

Deleted at interviewee's request

SN/KL: Haha.

KL: Just, presumably somebody, there must be some catch somewhere. But that would be your risk?

FP: It is...I mean, it's always when somebody would get injured, and it's really bad, or it's... Churches cant change light bulbs anymore, why you can't put ladders up higher than I think 6 metres. So you have to put a scaffold up. So to change like a light bulb in a church can cost like hundreds of pounds. So why you have to hire a scaffold, and a trained person to erect a scaffold, so they all have to be trained, and they all have to have tickets, and they all have to

have to be insured, and they have like the pews there, and you can't get your scaffold around the pews, then you have to unscrew the pews and move them. I mean...

KL: But this is all to satisfy where the money's coming from? The funders, is it?

FP: No, it's probably more...no, it's, it's, it's the health and safety acts...

KL: So simply just for running the op, running the church

FP: I mean, I mean none of the running the church is like that. It's a couple of rules set by health and safety, what you have to do. I mean, all my guys have to have hi-viz vests.

KL: Mmm.

FP: And I completely opposed against this. I mean I never get a fine, I had a couple of inspections, I don't...I find it ridiculous when you don't have a crane, and you don't have like huge dumper trucks driving around, or you work on the motorway, maybe have hi-viz vests. Or when you're on a church, why my guys have to have a hi-viz vest, I mean they're not robots, I mean they don't have to look all the same. So, I mean it's, it's stupid to, to, not stupid, bit silly to argue about this hi-viz vest. I mean they put a mask on when they need to, they put ear defenders on and glasses. They don't want to get chips in their eyes...

KL: Mmmm.

FP: And they have like safety boots, but there is certain things, they so... I mean it's just paper heavy. I mean I write for every job, this lengthly, lengthly, and it's just copying what everybody else right. That's like this CDM coordinator, he writes like a pack for the job, he oversees the job, he looks like what the architect wants to do on this job, so he writes what should be done on the job, and this and this is done. And I have to write what I do exactly the same as they already written, then the scaffolder comes he have to write the same thing, the glazer, the lead plumber, there's a joiner probably. And they all have to write this, there's a stack like this. I have to send it to the CDM coordinator, he err gives me a F10 form, what is like a certificate that I can work on site, and he send this to the health and safety executive, so... And they know that I be from this date to this date on this site, and it's been coordinated by this one person. They can come anytime and check..

KL: Right, yeah.

FP: Then they come on site, they want to see all the paperwork. They don't go up on the scaffold, they don't look at my guys, they don't look at their boots, they don't look anything. All they want to see is that I have a pin board in the church, with their forms on it, with my insurance on it, with the method statement, with the risk assessment. And all what they do, for 1 and half hours, they go through the papers, and they say 'that's fine', and they give a stamp, and they go. And that's..in my eyes, so heavy on smaller firms. Why Firm16GB they just have whatever how many people they have in their office, and writing their little spiels, I mean this is all what they do.

SN: Hmmm. Yeah.

FP: And craftsmen, I mean, I want, takes like the time of my hands to do a stone. So, I liaise with all the scaffolders and all these people so... Don't want to go on about health and safety.

SN: OK. Well the other thing that we've asked about....well come up a couple of times about tendering is erm, how easy it is to know the exact price on a conservation project.

FP: You never get an exact price. Can't, I mean it's...I'm always very proud when I get the feedback from the architects, with all the prices, and say they all 81,000, 83,000, 90,000. So you know you, whatever, when you, 95 or...when you in this bracket, it's fine....or you can't. It's a guesswork, conservation is, it's like somebody goes...or you have somebody on the street, and you pick this person and say 'what he could have when we bring him to a doctor and x-ray him?'. He's probably sick, he have something. How you know? Do you start opening him up and look inside? I mean you don't, and most of the symptoms, they so, I mean couple of jobs, I, I done. I mean one was Richardtown, they looked absolute perfect from the outside, absolute perfect. Perfect ashlar, the stones, the church tower completely over specified in my eyes, so I priced this job. We started there and there was some stones so eroded there was nothing behind them.

SN: Really?

FP: So it was like just tiles sitting there, could fall down. And the parapet was completely loose. It could, could've fallen down. And the reverend there abseiled to raise some money. I mean when he would've know. I mean he coulda literally killed 'imself on this parapet. I mean he could've ripped the whole parapet down. I mean we went up there and we literally just pulled apart, tonnes of stone and it just been sitting there waiting for whatever, a plane going by, everything could've fallen down. And it looked absolute perfect. The architect didn't know, I didn't know, and Kirby Grindalthe, for example, looked absolute horrendous, full of tar, holes, birds living in the joints, stones looking like their falling out, and we went there and they're absolute solid. We just raked everything out, pointed it up and was done. And there it looked like we had to do hundreds of stones, and was the reverse. So from a trained stonemason eye, and architect's eye. I mean I go quite often with architects and give them advice on how to specify and how I think it should be done, or how a crack could develop in the stone. Or, it's just guessing. Like a chimney, I mean when you dismantle a chimney, it can look absolute perfect from the outside, and over the years all the salt and the heat from the inside eroded the stone, and it's just a crust the outside. It's like literally like a paper stack standing there. And you can tap it and you can hear it, or you don't know really. And then you just, you try to take one stone and the whole thing collapse. Happen, many times. So, it's the experience, when you go to a chimney, that you maybe put in, this is then up to the specifier, to the architect, that they put like a very high provisional, they say maybe 50% replacement and 100%, err 50% provisional, so it becomes 100%. And in the end when it's 60% it's fine, so they have enough money in the pot. And everybody have to price for it. I mean I can show you one specification...(walks to shelves)...this a good one. They have general....

SN: When you help advise architects on the specification, do you charge for that?

FP: No.

SN: No? No.

FP: I mean sometimes, sometimes they offer. Not really, no.

KL: Mmm.

FP: Here you are, this is the other thing. I get as a return the tender sent to me, that I been there so I know roughly, or then again sometimes you don't get the job. Somebody else under price it. But I wanted to explain to you...

(Phone rings)

FP: No I go often with architects and look at...English Heritage pays me. Here you have....

SN: So you specify for English Heritage, what on their grant...?

FP: Mmmm.

SN:conditions?

FP: No, no when they go before like phase 1.

SN: Right.

FP: When they get phase 1, when they look at a job and think what's the quantities, what they want to do. And sometimes they say 'we don't know Fred. How many stones you think? And then I go there, and then sometimes just prove what they said already, what they thought. Or maybe I say

'look at this and think about this', so... Or it's...and then they pay me. I mean I went to a couple of sites with English Heritage where they ask me, and then they sent me the tender too. Doesn't matter... What I wanted to say, they put like extra err provisional, provisional extra, and provisional how you say, lump sum. So for nothing, they would say just provisional on the whole job, we put in £7,000, provisional sum. Or this firm, they're putting in this lump sum, and they specify cutting out, renew areas, pointing and masonry, walling square metres, 3 square metres, what it cost. So you have to put like item there, and so everybody bus this, and so this extra number 4 can come like to 16, 20,000. Of it's not included in the whole contract anyway, why they will take this out. So they will go to the client, they'll say, for example,

'180,000 is the job, 20,000 is the provisional extras, or this provisional we don't put in the contract. Or do you want to put in the contract? Do you have enough money?' I mean it's like up to them, and sometimes they take it in, and it's really wise to do so. Or it's a breakdown, and English Heritage also take into consideration, sometimes I do know the English Heritage sometimes very highly under estimate with their quantity surveyor. Certain jobs. Sometime highly over estimate.

SN: Mmm

FP: This is like what I sometimes say, it's, it's never...I mean your always in the middle somewhere. So I say I think it's rough 80,000 or 100,000 and they say 160,000, and I say '160 is a bit much' or, when you think so. And then the architect'll say

'well, let's say maybe 120'.

KL: Mmmm

FP: And then maybe ends up with 60 and everybody's happy, or it's, it's very...it's something you can't...conservation work, you can't specify. As I say it before, I mean the architect is always in the middle of the...I don't want to be architect, I mean I've done a couple of jobs directly with clients where I did a specification for them. I assessed the whole thing, and then when something goes wrong they just come back to you and say

'why didn't see this before?'. I say

'well I haven't x-ray eyes', you know? I don't, I didn't know. I mean, and so, when I have a architect who get paid for it, I just point at him. Say

'look. Can you explain it to the client?'.
SN: Haha.

FP: Or most of the time I have to say, most jobs can ask of the architects, we finish on the budget, never over budget. I mean you can't, when no money. They don't have funding and I do know this certain firms getting on the extras that's how they make their money. And sometimes they have to then cut out things of the contract. They would cut out a couple of items, and divert the money to all the rest, and that's all for the extras, and this is where some architects get really, I mean they feel like they been ripped off by the c, by the contractor. Or this what I say to you, it's a very short-lived thing.

SN: Mmmm

FP: Dominos you heard of?

SN: Uh huh.

FP: And for, 5 years I say Dominos is a very short, one project. I mean they been so with their nose in the air, huge prices and they just did Selby and they been celebrating saying 'next year we will do St Paul's in London and be...'. Because they didn't have any masons, I mean they just, they didn't. I had a couple of German masons, they worked for Dominos, and I did like all the err, in, I mean like 5, 6, years ago, all the carvings we did as subcontractors for Dominos. And they been so dodgy how they set it up, there was just a money-making thing. There was like side managers, they set up their own business, and they would buy from me a stone and sell it to their own business. So they would buy it from me, they would know what the price is, come to me, I give them a low price, and then they would add something on what is probably even chea, it's still cheaper than the original, so they would just be in the middle and selling the stone. Now I mean this is how Domino operated, I mean it's, it's, it's known, some of these people been sacked, they been told. And they don't exist anymore, they went bust, so...

SN: Oh dear.

FP: And, and they been very money orientated. I don't think they loved what they did. I mean they coulda sold bread, they coulda s..coulda made cars. There's not how you repair churches, this is not...or old houses. This is not...I mean. You have to make money, I don't say it's not the enterprise to make money, or it's....the most firms, they be

passionate about...they definitely surviving, and at the moment I hear all the big firms, as I say they could sell anything, and they be run by quantity surveyors and by whatever, they have management buyouts over the years, they play all golf and they just looking at numbers... But doesn't work, I mean Linford's you heard...

KL: Mmm

SN: Yeah

FP: ...I mean I knew David Linford quite well, so you know it's very sad, it's tragic why he was passionate about old buildings, or it's just greed. I mean that's what he say to me. I ask him why it's happened, and he say it's just greed. Family and greed, and I mean this is....what'll happen isn't it, when you don't love what you do it doesn't work. I mean I'm not, not completely safe. I can say everything I bought ever in this firm, it's always paid. I never borrowed any money. I mean the banks hate me...

SN: Haha

FP: ...they just...I don't have any mortgage or anything, ever. I mean it's, I just with the means what I can do. I mean I could need a new van or, why... just look at all these firms. I don't wanna say names, they all have flashy...

SN: ...vans...

FP: ...vans, with all their writing on. This van is probably 9 years old or something, it's still running, and does the job, and I don't want to say it's a good thing or... I just buy something when I need it, and this is how I did it the whole time. I never went over the top. It's just.....tricky isn't it?

SN: Yeah. There's just one more thing I want to ask you, and it was about materials, and where abouts you sourced the stone, and how you sourced it.

FP: Always local. Well it's heavy, so you don't really want to move them around, or it's, it's tricky sometimes to get local. Why, with conservation projects, old buildings been built on sites where they dug the stone out a mile or half a mile ago, away, and brought them in. And now they all filled and they don't exist anymore, so we have like 100,000 less quarries than what we had 100 years ago, and quarries always shut down. They all multi big companies, French, American, German companies. So they spread allover....I mean where we now in the East Riding, all the churches, I try to use local material, and most of the time specified in the specification. Sometimes they say 'or similar', they don't say always exactly what it is, they say... I have a job now where they say Warmsworth, Cadeby, or Tadcaster Highmoor. Tadcaster Highmoor is £4,000, Warmsworth is 2,000. So in the, of all 3, I would be dumb to put in Tadcaster Highmoor. Or I would price myself out against the competition, everybody will go for Warmsworth or Cadeby, they cheaper, and when they leave this open spectrum, it's most of the time they had it by British survey, geological survey analysed. And English Heritage, any contract, I mean, I don't know, what is it, over 50,000, what they call a small contract, have to have like a, a, a survey done on the stone, and they have to have like a David Jefferson, or there's somebody else, Dr or Lord Cranelot from the British Survey, geological survey. And they're writing like, for £800 or £1,200, a pamphlet and sending it, and, and this pamphlet will say 'the matching stone is historic quarry there, there, there, there, not any more in working in order'. You can't get stone there, so the only stone we can say what is very close to this, what is never close, is go to west Yorkshire, or go up to, to Darlington, so east or

west. I mean it's, it's very closed. Most of the stones, I mean I don't know what this stone down next to you, this one here, just... Don't know, this, I forget...it could be like from Whitby, so it's most of the time you've been forced to use local stone. And, and I try to convince people when they coming with headstones to me, you can, what we just said before, you can buy from China, a container load, like probably 600 headstones, for £50 each. They polished, they nicely bubble wrapped, you can take them out, and they can sell them each for £600 in this country. Obviously 600 headstones is quite hard to sell...

KL: Haha

FP: I mean it isn't if you live probably in London or you know a couple of cemeteries, and this is what people do. They have syndicates, they buy a whole container, and each take 50, and they just selling them, and they making huge profits. And all the headstones you see these days, all these polished granite ones, they all from China and from India, and they all going to computerized machines, and they probably been quarried by children...I mean it's really quite horrible, so, so I try to convince...so when, when you've lived here, or there was somebody from Penrith, so I say 'why don't get Penrith green slate? It's beautiful stone'. So they did. Or there was somebody from the south, they liked the south very much, so 'why don't get a Portland headstone?'. So it's, I try to do as local as possible. And it's always adding the cost, I mean a headstone from Portland to transport here...I mean you can get it probably as cheap as £75, and the stone costs maybe £200, so..

Phone rings.

KL: Well I think we've probably...

FP: Covered most of it?

KL: Yeah.

SN: Yeah. Thank you very much, sorry to keep you so late...

Janice Coe and Steve Taylor, Firm12GB. Date unrecorded.

SN:it was, was always externally funded, but now it's externally funded by different people, erm so yeah what I do is slightly different. But this I'm doing off my own back...

JC: Oh right.

SN: Erm, because I'm doing, I've started doing a research degree and erm this is forming part of it, cos I'm looking at the kind of relationship between crafts and conservation.

JC: Oh right. Yeah.

SN: Yeah. So we've been asking companies, and we'd like to ask you, sort of how big the company is, what sort of skills you have, cos you're quite un...unusual in the companies we've interviewed in that you do an awful lot...

JC: Yeah.

SN: Other companies are specialists in one...

JC: One thing, where we try and, yeah. I think we've got a dozen men.

SN: OK.

JC: Yeah. Errr, and we've got a bricklayer, 2 stone ma...2 stonemasons, erm 2 joiners, err, tryin' to remember what else we've got. Yeah, 2 joiners, 2 stonemasons, 1 bricklayer, 2 roofin', roofers, lead roofers. Errr, that's it, and then the rest are labourers.

SN: OK.

JC: Erm, but 2 or 3 of them are quite good, y'know, cos they've worked for us for a lot of years. They're able to sorta turn their hand to all different things.

KL: Mmm.

JC: Which is quite good, cos we do try and keep everything in house.

KL: Right. Rather that subcontracting anything out?

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean obviously plumbin' works an erm electricians and things like that, then obviously that's specialist, erm, but erm most the things that we do is all in house. Coffee?

KL: Please, yeah. D'you 'ave sugar?

SN: No thanks.

JC: Do you have sugar Kim?

KL: No thank you, no thank you.

JC: This is luxury this cabin compared to some I've been in!

SN: It's nice!

KL: Impressed, yeah. Does this just like follow you round then, for the jo...or...?

JC: No we, it depends, we hire them in, and obviously depending on the size of the contract, is to what we have. But obviously health and safety is so on the ball now, that you've got to really have everythin', have all the facilities...

KL: Mmmm.

JC: ...for your staff really.

SN: Right OK.

JC: So erm...

ST: Do you want me down 'ere just yet Janice, or...

JC: Erm, yeah... I mean whatever, if you need to be up there...

ST: I can do whatever. Vince just said see what your plans are.

JC: Yeah, join in. Cos I think you'll probably be able to give them a bit more information. Steve, do you want a coffee?

ST: Yeah, please.

JC: How d'you have it?

ST: Err, milk one sugar please.

JC: I'm jut tellin' Sophie and Kim just a little bit about what we do, and 'ow many staff we've got and what they all do. So that's about as far as I've got to really.

SN: So are you a mason then Steve?

JC: Stonemason, yeah.

SN: Stonemason.

ST: Yeah.

SN: And how did you come to be a stonemason?

ST: Right. Originally I lived in North Yorkshire, in Knaresborough.

SN: Oh really.

ST: Yeah. That's where I'm from.

SN: OK.

ST: And I 'ad a friend a mine who was workin' for the department of the environment...

SN: Right...

ST: Which changed to English 'Eritage in 1986.

SN: Yep.

ST: And my friend, 'e took an apprenticeship as a stonemason, in about '84, based at Fountains Abbey in Ripon.

SN: Really?

ST: So I started in '86 with 'em...

SN: Uh huh

ST: Based at Fountains Abbey.

SN: Right.

ST: And in them days, like I say, it'd just been...thank you Janice...

Interruption

ST: ...so I went there originally, I started workin' as a labourer there. 'E. 'e, 'e did a...in them days, they did a proper apprenticeship where they 'ad a banker shop set up at Fountains, there's an old mill as you went int yard...

SN: Yeah.

ST: ...that's what we used to use.

SN: Yeah.

ST: And the downstairs floor was converted for all the stonemasons, they did 3-year course, and for 2-years they stayed inside the banker shop, they never came onto site. Just learnin' to carve, goin' to York College once a week, and doin' a proper apprenticeship. And then in the 3rd year they would come out and then go on site, and then start gettin' experience.

SN: Right.

ST: So, for the first 8-years I never moved from Fountains.

SN: Really?

ST: We were permanently based...we did all our own work, we did all the conservation work, we did all our own scaffolding, we did everything, within the abbey grounds itself. The National Trust actually owned the abbey...

KL/SN: Uh huh.

ST: ...but English Heritage were kept on to maintain err the upkeep a the abbey. So I was based there. I never moved. And then...

SN: So do you know Henry Rumbold?

ST: Henry was my boss for 20 years.

SN: Really.

ST: Yes. Yeah.

SN: Right OK.

ST: All, all the projects I done, and when I got me heritage card and everything, I've done through Henry.

SN: Right OK. So you stay in touch with 'im?

ST: Oh yeah, yeah. I based....do you know other lads from Ripon? Do you know John Maloney?

SN: I've met John Maloney once.

ST: Yeah. I know 'e told me you'd been out....I worked with John Maloney...cos I been workin' with a lad from York the previous 5-years, Andy O'boyle.

SN: Yeah. I don't know Andy O'boyle so well.

ST: No, no. Well Andy and John Maloney used to be partners years ago

SN: Right OK.

ST: And then they both set up on their own, and then what they tend to do is they do a lot a jobs together. And I did a project up at Hackfall just outside Ripon...

SN: ...yeah John told me about Hackfall...

KL: Oh Hackfall?

ST: ..for John. I was up there with John.

SN: He told me about the tufa...

ST: The tufa, yeah.

SN: Special...there's this kind of like tiny seam of unusual stone near Hackfall isn't there?

ST: Yeah.

KL: Oh is there?

SN: There's this grotto built of it.

ST: You 'ave to walk 'round...

KL: Yeah I've walked round it, yes, fascinating.

ST: Yeah, when we were re-doin' it, we 'ad to walk 'round and find the tufa. Search all 'round the floor and then take it back up and try and mount it all back on. It was quite a, a interesting project. Yeah, so I was up there...I did about 8 or 9 months up there wi John. So I've worked wi John. Everybody in our industry 'as a connection with either York, Ripon or Doncaster.

SN: Why Doncaster?

Interruption

ST: There was a small team of people err, a fella called Steve Arrowsuch...

SN: Yeah...

ST: That ended up, and 'is brother Ray Arrowsuch, they're Doncaster lads. So everybody...originally in the olden days, everybody was based... They'd either be a minster base, like York Minster, or Ripon Cathedral...

SN: Or Fountains...

ST: Or Fountains Abbey. So everybody connection. John Maloney worked under Henry Rumbold for years. I worked under Henry for 20 years. Andy O'boyle came from Fountains Abbey under... Steve Arrowsuch from Doncaster trained at Fountains Abbey, and did 'is apprenticeship through their. Everybody is connected in some way to that little area.

SN: Right.

ST: So...then what 'appened, I tr...I started as a labourer, I then started runnin' jobs, and I sorta worked me way up, soin' everythin' from, err in them days it was all, it was still government thing, an it was like a leadin' hand, then a charge hand, and then became a foreman, and I used to run sites. And then in the middle a that I went to York Tech, and I did me stonemason qualification.

SN: Right, OK.

ST: Under Bill Bassett

SN: Yeah

ST: And err Eric Donovan was me teacher there. Well Eric was one a me best mates from Fountains, 'e's a Fountains lad. Erm, and then we privatised...I used to work for a company called...after English Heritage it went to Firm15GB..

SN: Right. No I know...

ST: Right, you know....

SN: Yeah. We're gonna speak to Isaac next week.

ST: Isaac....Peach?

SN: Yes.

ST: Yeah. Well, that's where I finished. I worked there....through there, I was a stonemason, but I was also like a foreman, then an area foreman for them. For quite a few years.

SN: For Firm15GB?

ST: For Firm15GB, yeah.

SN: Oh really.

ST: I was, I've only just....because English 'Eritage became Firm15GB, so I started with 'Eritage in '86, worked with 'em when they quite privatised in early '90's. That got turned into Firm15GB...

SN: Yeah.

ST: I worked with them right through to 2006.

SN: Right.

ST: I finished in 2006.

SN: Right OK.

ST: Henry started....he had all 'is works in Romania, he was travellin' across quite a lot, there was a new thing... I was sort of down to take over as a contracts manager, and things didn't work out. Isaac Peach come in, and 'e become the contracts manager. And after that I left, I worked with Andy O'boyle then.

SN: Right OK.

ST: Err, based in York. And we were doin' a lot of the council...buildin' the civic theatre. We did a café at Lendall Bridge...

KL: Oh yeah.

ST: We did quite a lot around the actual York itself, and then we came away, we 'ad a big phase at Nostell Priory...

SN: Uh huh

ST: There's a business park, we did a conversion or a refectory and a brew house as such...

SN: Uh huh...

ST: ...and I worked with Andy for 5 years, and they again work started dryin' for us Christmas last year. We ended up goin' to the Isle a Wight. I went to work for a company called Cathedral Works Organisation, who, by royal appointment, they do all of the Tower of London, Buckingham Palace. And the lad whose in charge there, Adam Stone, trained at Fountains Abbey. Is a good mate of Andy's.

SN: Yeah.

ST: And that's 'ow come. And we just been over...we did 5-months in the Isle-a-Wight, place called Bendtner

SN: Right

ST: Did a church in the Isle a Wight, and then we come back and we didn't 'ave the work and such like, and then luckily I got in touch wi Vince, and I got an opportunity to come wi Vince, doin' exactly the same thing that I've always done. Workin' with exactly the same architects, exactly the same people...

SN: Yeah, I've just noticed....

ST: Everybody I worked with, Arnold Levy, Ferry and Mennim, Caleb Hamilton, all people that I worked with for Firm15GB when we did err, we did the conversion of the water mill and such as that. Err, it's such a close knit thing...

SN: Yeah.

ST: ...you're all connected. No matter where you go, you've got some connection with everybody, y'know, so... And that's about it really.

SN: OK

ST: An err, I've been with Vince and Janice a year I think...

JC: Nearly...

ST: Just comin' up to a year.

JC: ...a year yeah.

ST: So, things are good.

SN: So do you, erm, are you, do you live down here now then?

ST: I do yeah. I, I met somebody...English 'Eritage took over Brodsworth 'All

SN: Yeah.

ST: And when we came 'round to take over the house, we did all the restoration, all the new columns, all the stone. I did all the stable blocks with Firm15GB. I did the Fern Dell, the gardens within Brodsworth 'All. We also did Conisborough Castle, we put the roof on and the floors in at Conisborough Castle. And Whilst I was travellin' down, I met somebody and I settled down 'ere. I've been 'ere 18 years now.

SN: Oh really?

ST: Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah so the last 18 years I've been travelling...

SN: Going up?

ST: I'm going north, yeah. So I live in a village just outside Brodsworth. The next village down, Woodlands is where I live.

SN: Right OK.

ST: So I ended up settling down 'ere.

SN: Oh I see.

ST: But like I say most a the work was always, y'know, goin' back upwards.

SN: Right.

ST: So.

SN: OK. So when you started at English Heritage in 19...well was it the Department of the Environment?

ST: No it'd just changed. It changed in '85 I think, '86 was English 'Eritage. I started English 'Eritage.

SN: So when that started, do, did you go in as a 16 year old without any experience?

ST: No. I went in, I would be...I'd already left school, I'd been workin' in garages. I would be probably 20.

SN: 20.

ST: 'Round about that age, yeah.

SN: But you hadn't got any ...but, you had like you could show that you wanted to do practical work...

ST: Yeah.

SN: But you didn't have any building skill.

ST: That's right yeah. I went in, I'd come outta school, I'd left school at 16 and I'd gone into garages, I were mechaning and panel beatin' and such like. Totally different industry whatsoever.

SN: Yeah.

ST: And then I did a bit a travellin' 'round, a friend a mine was a long-distance lorry driver, so I 'ad a short spell a goin' 'round the world a little bit and travellin' to a few places.

SN: Right.

ST: And then I came back and I was at a loose end. And when I went to Fountains initially, it was just initially a stop gap. My mate Andy said 'look, there's a job going'. In them days you 'ad to sit in front a the board, you 'ad a panel, you 'ad to sit. It was a very rigorous...to get on with 'em.

SN: Mmm.

ST: Err, all their offices were mainly, they were all based in York in them days, opposite the minster.

SN: Uh huh.

ST: And it was quite a thing to get in with them. And I got in, and I just ended up enjoyin' it, and stayin', you know, and I've been at it what 27 years, 35, 26, 27 years, whatever it is.

SN: Yeah. Did many people stay long? Did lots of people stay long?

ST: Errr, no, cos what they tended to do. Everybody who became any good tended to get all their training paid for, through 'Eritage. And then all set up their own. That's what they did, that's the way they were goin'.

KL: Oh OK.

ST: They all, they all set up their own companies. And that's 'ow they did it. There wasn't many of us erm, I, I, I 'ad 1 or 2 there, who'd been there 30 years. Old Brian, 'e'd been there 30 odd years, workin' with 'Enry...

SN: Henry was there for a long time.

ST: 'Enry was there all the way through, yeah. When I started erm, Henry was the number 2 on the site. Wilf Robinson, a fella called Wilf Robinson was runnin' Fountains Abbey in them days.

SN: I've never heard of Wilf, I've heard of Dave Sweeney.

ST: Yeah well Dave Sweeney was Henry Rumbold's right hand man.

SN: Oh ok.

ST: In them days Dave was Henry's right hand man. Dave Sweeney did all, did all...'e was like the banker mason. He took all the apprentices and spent the 3 years with the apprentices in the banker shop.

SN: Ok.

ST: Henry tended to sort of organise all the lads on site, who was doin' what and takin' everything down. And then the lads'd go for 2 years with Dave, was more, was more a banker mason. Would sit an do all 'is settin' out an that, and then Dave did takeover for a short time, but 'e died quite recently afterwards.

SN: Oh really?

ST: Yeah, 'e'd only been in charge I think 4 or 5 years, and then 'e died. 'E died quite young Dave, yeah.

SN: Oh, that's sad.

ST: So, but yeah.

SN: And so fast forward to now. When I met you Janice first, you weren't working with Steve.

JC: No Steve wasn't here then.

SN: But you were looking for people...

JC: Mmmm.

SN: ...but you, you were like, you didn't wanna train anybody, you wanted to find someone with skills, and it was really hard to find somebody with skills.

JC: So when was that?

SN: That must've been about 2 and a half years ago I would've thought...

JC: Really, as long as that?

SN: Maybe 2 years ago.

JC: Probably, golly, goin' on for 3 you know.

SN: No it can't...I've only been in Yorkshire since err summer 2009.

JC: Oh right OK.

SN: So I reckon it's about 2-years.

JC: 2-years ago.

SN: Yeah. Around 2-years. So what, has like, has, has, has Steve brought a lot to the business.

JC: Erm...we had all the contracts in, obviously, I mean we sort of work a year in advance really, from pricin'.

SN: OK.

JC: So it is very difficult to sort of say. But I think, as far as sort of like architects go, erm, I think y'know, obviously, Villiers, who we're workin' for now, they were quite impressed that you'd come on board I think weren't they?

ST: T...yeah. I knew Martin Villiers, 'e was at Paul Ruddy's years ago that I used to deal with.

JC: Yeah. Erm, but things are very different now to what they were couple of years ago, it...things are so much harder.

SN: Really?

JC: You know, we're pricin' for contracts, and we might get 1 out of 'alf a dozen.

SN: Really?

JC: Yeah. Yeah, there's not the work comin' through like what there was 2 years ago.

SN: Really.

KL: So it's just much more competitive, what there is?

JC: Mmmm, it's very difficult to say. I mean, y'know, you into...last year, at the end of last year we priced 3 or 4 jobs, err 1 in Clarenton, which is sort of like what we would call our church, what we've done all the re-roofin' on...

KL: Mmmm

JC: And, err, we really worked hard on the tender...

SN: Mmm.

JC: We were workin' on it for probably about a month, erm, and we went in at just 5% profit, and we still didn't get it.

SN: Really? Do you know who did get it?

JC: Yeah. Fred...d'you know...

SN: Oh did 'e

JC: Yeah. D'you know 'im?

SN: Mmm, yeah.

KL: Who we've seen?

SN: Yeah.

KL: Oh right.

JC: So he seems to be getting' the cream of everythin' at the minute.

SN: Interesting that it's so close to you as well, isn't it?

JC: Mmmm. Yeah, yeah cos obviously we didn't 'ave to put any...

SN: Travel...

JC: Travel on. Errrm very limted to cabins, you know storage...

KL: Mmm, mmm

JC: Because we're only up the road, everything can be stored at the yard.

SN: Mmm.

JC: Erm, so yeah.

SN: Right OK. That's interesting.

JC: So yeah, we've lost a lot...I think we lost 3 towards the back end a last year to 'im.

SN: What about erm...do you find that erm...other companies that you...cos you must a been competing against Fred for quite a long time.

JC: We probably have, we probably have, erm and not really taken a great deal of notice of it because there's a lot more work coming through then.

KL: Mmm

SN: Yeah.

JC: Now there's not as much comin' through...

SN: Mmm

JC: And you realise exactly...

ST: We struggled...for the last 6 months I was with Andy at AOB...

SN: Yeah.

ST: We struggled with Fred, we couldn't keep up with 'im. That's why we, why we ended up goin' to the Isle a Wight.

SN: Really?

ST: 'E was winnin' everythin'. I mean people say allsorts, y'know, I do know 'e 'as a lot a people come over from Germany. 'Is costs seem to be down y'know from what 'e pays 'em, and it, it was cuttin', 'e was cuttin' us in North Yorkshire down for a good 6... Like I say, that was the reason...Andy 'ad been trainin' under AOB for about 13 years, set up 'is own business, big *muffled*, big everythin', and we found Fred a problem way before....for winnin' work wise. Y'know 'e just seems to win everythin'. And it's caused, it 'as caused a lotta upset within our industry. Within the people that I know certainly.

SN: Right.

ST: Because we just can't compete.

JC: And we've probably not noticed it as much, cos we've done a lot more refurbishments rather than the actual stonemasonry...

SN: Mmm.

JC: ...err side work. But unfortunately the last few jobs we've had have all been, more or less, basically, majority of it's been stone work.

SN: Yeah cos he only competes where it's a big percentage of stone work doesn't he?

JC: Yeah, apparently 'e does pick and choose what contracts that 'e wants.

SN: Mmm.

JC: Errr, and obviously 'e would want Clarenton because 'e'd knew...'e would know that we were 'is main competitor...

ST: Mmm

JC: ...for it. So err.... So yeah, so it's not good really at the minute. It's erm, it's a bit worrying, you know.

SN: Yeah.

JC: With...I think we'll be alright, erm this year, but it's, it's heading off really, really slowly. But this time 2 months ago we were exactly the same position.

SN: Really?

JC: Yeah.

SN: So what sort of work is coming through?

JC: Mainly, most of it's stone work.

SN: Right.

JC: Yeah. Stone work. I've just picked a small...I....we have just picked a small refurbishment job up in Sheffield for 6 weeks, starting in March.

SN: Mmm.

JC: Errr, new kitchen, toilets...

SN: Right.

JC: Err, just a basic refurb...new floors. So we've just picked that up, but again we've gone in with no profit. So we've got no room for error.

KL: So you're just keeping people busy really, aren't you?

JC: Yeah. Yeah. No room for error. And you do get it, specially on contracts like these...

SN: Conservation contracts?

JC: Yeah, yeah.

SN: Do you find that? Do you find that there's less...there's more unknowns with conservation.

JC: Oh God definitely...

ST: Yeah.

JC: Definitely.

ST: As soon as you...when you go to look at somethin', you can look and 'ave everythin' planned out in ya head, but as soon as you uncover something, it's a whole can a worms.

JC: Mmmm.

ST: And the extra work on top is unbelievable.

SN: Right.

ST: Always on conservation projects, always.

SN: Right.

KL: And is there a normal way of dealing with that? An approach to how you try and anticipate unknowns? You know, through contingencies or...

JC: Oh yeah, through contingencies and things like that, but...

KL: ...and is that agreed up front? Or at least the process, is that agreed...

JC: Yeah, I mean obviously...

KL: ...with client as to how you'd deal with that?

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But I mean, in a lotta cases Kim, contengenc...we've just done a big job at Botesford 'aven't we Steve?

ST: Yeah, yeah.

JC: An I mean contingencies didn't even...

ST: They're next to nothin' are they?

JC: No.

ST: For what we open, what you open up.

JC: I mean, we price this job what maybe couple of 'undred thousand pound. Errr, priced it 12 months prior, started the work and it ended up being a completely different job didn't it?

ST: Yeah. Soon as we got on day 1, as soon as we went on that job day 1 and I went with the architect, and we just opened up a little bit a the stonework...

SN: Mmmm.

ST: It just changed everythin' from what was just a little point with a few stone replacements, to a major rebuilding job. Everything...cos when you start going into it, you see it. It's not stable, if that's not stable, that's not gonna be stable,

that's not gonna be stable and it ends up to be a massive... So it just changed the job, so it mighta been planned like 18 months in advance, but then on day 1 of the site meeting, and ya get 'ammer and chisel, cos it's the first time...they do everythin' off the ground.

SN: Mmm

ST: So everything's what they look at. As soon as you get a scaffold up, and you start that contract, and you start knockin' into it...

SN: Mmm

ST: And then you just see, it just becomes a totally different job.

KL: So are there any occasions when there would be a bit more ex, exploration if you like? So somebody would go in and investigate a bit further before the contract...well before the specs put together?

JC: Yeah we do do quite a lot of erm things inspections for...specially Villers. Err, before they put a tender package out.

KL: Right, uh huh.

JC: Err, but the obviously...they're only again scratching the surface. Y'know, they've only got probably a certain amount a money that they can spend on these inspections, they'll do a small... If it's roofing they'll put a small hole in the roof, cut a joist out or somethin'. Err, but then y'know, you could go to the other side a the roof, it could be a completely different story.

ST: Mmm, yeah.

KL: Mmm.

JC: So, you know, there's no guarantees with anythin'.

KL: But that kind of work, that pre....this inspection work...

JC: Yeah.

KL: Err, I mean is that in itself quite helpful for you in terms of just generating a bit a cash?

JC: It is. I mean we did an inspection here, err, well yeah err, we did an inspection here, 2 years ago, prior to us pricin' the job, so maybe 2 and a half years ago. I think they'd got a budget in it for £2,000 and they wanted to open up some drainage. We opened up the drains, and they collapsed. So, we ended up with a bill of about £4,000 that is still outstandin', even now. And I hope that we can recuperate it into the works here.

KL: Mmmm. So obviously that didn't turn out to your advantage, but, but normally you'd expect that that would...

JC: You would.

KL: Keep bringing in a bit of...

JC: Yeah, yeah.

KL: Pin money sorta thing.

JC: Yeah.

SN: Do you think it gives you an advantage when it actually comes to the tender as well? Cos you know the building a bit better than the others might.

JC: Oh well, yeah, yeah, yeah. But not in Clarenton's case.

ST: No, no.

SN: No.

JC: So, but everybody's just at the moment....I don't know if you're findin' that as you're travellin' 'round talkin' to people...

SN: We're finding a range of responses really.

JC: Are ya?

SN: Yeah. Definitely. Aren't we *(to KL)*?

KL: Yes, there's not a clear pattern.

ST: I mean we found between ourselves that things started to...as soon as it was announced that the Olympics was gonna be held in this country, things started very, very quickly, to dry up. We found that a few years ago.

KL: And this is because the money's being diverted...

JC: Yeah.

KL: ...away from heritage.

ST: Gets diverted elsewhere, yeah. So yeah it goes into new sporting venues, stuff like that. Stuff that was set aside for.... Y'know that's what we found, when I talk to anybody in the trade they've all said the same thing. That was the point when things really started y'know, the screw turned.

SN: Right. So that should hopefully be better by the end of the year?

JC: Well you would think...

SN: But then...

JC: ...so, but...

SN: So, is that because...do you work on a lot a projects that are sorta funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, or...

JC: I think we've only got 1 err lottery funded project possibly comin' through.

SN: Right.

JC: Err most of it is just either English Heritage, or y'know, the parish of 'ave been able to raise the money themselves.

SN: Right Ok. Is that what's this one? Is this one English Heritage?

JC: Yeah.

SN: Right OK.

JC: Yeah. But when it's English Heritage funded it's quite complicated and it's very slow in getting' your money.

SN: Reallyly?

JC: Yeah, 5 years ago when we were doin' it, 14 days ya money was in ya bank, but no now...

KL: How soon? Sorry, how soon?

JC: 14 days. 5 years...

KL: 14 days?!

JC: 5 years ago now.

KL: That sounds pretty amazing actually.

JC: Yeah. Now 3 months, 4 months.

SN: Really?

JC: Which doesn't work well for cash flow.

KL: No, no.

SN: And is that because....d, does the diocese pay you? Or does English Heritage pay you directly?

JC: English Heritage'll pay you...

SN: Oh really?

JC: Well no, but err English Heritage erm...the architects'll agree that so much works been done, they send the client, which might be the church, confirmation that they're gonna be gettin' an invoice, who the send English Heritage confirmation that x amount of work's been done, and that they can expect a bill. And it can...the procedure there can take a month.

SN: Mmmm.

JC: From them getting' the right paperwork.

SN: Right.

JC: And then they have to pay the church, the parish that you're workin' for...

SN: And then they pay you...

JC: ...and then they pay us.

SN: Right OK. So it is quite long.

JC: Yeah. Quite long and drawn out. But, you know, 5 years ago it wasn't like this at all, it's a lot harder now than what it's ever been.

SN: Right.

KL: Are you looking sort of further afield for work? Both in terms of geographical area, and maybe the types of project that you might look at?

JC: Well now obviously I keep looking on the internet on a regular basis, seein' what's comin' up. Because obviously now you have to tender, and apply to tender...

KL: Mmmm.

JC: ...for contracts. So you know, you keep your eyes on the Yorkshire Post...

KL: Uh huh

JC: Erm... And, I mean we are quite lucky cos we have got quite a good erm, client basis, where the churches will come to us and 'ave odd repairs...

KL: Mmm

JC: ...done. This, that and the other. So...we're on the local diocese register for schools...

SN: Oh OK.

JC: So erm we do quite a few schools...

SN: And do you find...what's the tender process like there?

JC: Err, again, it all...a lot of it's down to the architect...

SN: Right.

JC: You know, if you're workin' with a good architect that'll y'know, point you in the right direction at times. That's often helpful.

SN: Uh huh

JC: But we just, we just tend... Anything that we get comin' through the door now, we sort of look at where it is, see what the job entails, and then make a decision whether we're gonna go for it or not basically.

SN: Uh huh.

JC: But there's such...I mean, I sent a price in yesterday for a job, erm some playground works at a school just the other side of Doncaster, and the price range was. There were 4 of us that priced it, erm...the lowest was 30, and the highest was 47. I mean that's just a massive...

SN/KL: Mmmm.

JC: £17,000...

KL: For a playground?

JC: For a playground.

SN: Such a small contract. Who to...who won?

JC: Don't know. We were second.

SN: Does it normally go to the lowest?

JC: Yeah

SN: Right.

JC: But then the lowest one, there could be a problem, they could not've allowed for certain things, so you just 'ave to wait and see.

SN: Mmm.

KL: So, h, how far would you be prepared to travel? Is it harder cos you've got quite a lot of people working for you?

JC: No, I mean we've just finished a contract at Hebden Bridge, (to ST) where's that?

ST: Halifax. Top side a Halifax, so...

JC: 'Bout an hour and a half away. We..when we first started goin' back, what, I don't know, 13, 14 years ago, we did a heck of a lot a work up in York.

SN: Oh really?

JC: We were always in York, but...again that seems to 'ave dried up quite a lot.

SN: Was that on churches?

JC: Mmm.

SN: Right.

JC: We just priced a job in Selby, but we didn't get that.

SN: Right.

JC: Erm, but no...

SN: Was that...that wasn't Selby Abbey?

JC: No. Err, no. It was Selby....

KL: Selby. Is that Scarborough way?

SN: No, it's south of York.

JC: Yeah.

SN: It's like...erm...

KL: Oh I don't know that. No, I don't know it.

SN: It's down the directly south of York isn't really?

JC: It is yeah, yeah.

SN: About 10 miles or something.

JC: Yeah, it's quite...just off the A1.

SN: Yeah.

JC: St Ossall's church, Selby.

SN: So it is difficult. And what about other types of building? Like things like bridges? Local authority bridges..?

JC: No we don't get...we don't seem to get anything through for things like that.

SN: Right, and things like, y'know, Conisborough Castle? We drove past that...

JC: No we've not had anything from there.

SN: Right. So it is mainly the churches.

JC: Mmm.

SN: And do you do any private work?

JC: We do, we've always said as a rule of thumb, sort of between Vince and myself, anythin' that sorta comes locally through the door we will do.

SN: Right.

JC: So a Clarenton base.

SN: So word of mouth stuff.

JC: Anything further afield, we don't tend to bother, only because the chances of you getting paid sometimes are quite slim, y'know, so...

KL: Because it's coming...it's an individual paying rather than a grant?

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But we've got, y'know, maybe a dozen customers on our list locally...

SN: Uh huh

JC: That'll ring us and say "ave you got somebody that can come and fit that door, this door, my win...I've gotta sash window and it's leakin". Y'know, so...we 'ave got a few customers.

KL: Mmmm

SN: Uh huh.

JC: Err, but anythin' that somebody rings us for that's for, erm the otherside a Doncaster, I'd just say that we were too busy.

SN: Oh OK.

JC: Yeah.

SN: So how...you said that you travelled to Hebden Bridge.

JC: Yeah.

SN: Would you...is that like pretty much the limit of where you'd go, or...

JC: No I think we'd go a couple of hours away.

SN: Really? 2 hours away.

JC: Yeah, but I think you've gotta sorta decide, y'know how big the contract is, how many men you've got, and y'know, if it was for a considerable amount a time, do you then put on digs. You've just got to weight it all up.

SN: Mmmm yeah. Mmm. Yeah you would have to. OK. And then...(to KL) what were you gonna say?

KL: I was just gonna say, so the, the contracts are awarded d'you think...purely on price? Or, or other factors?

JC: I think pure...95% of it's on price.

KL: Right.

JC: I think sometimes maybe the architect's got it mind who they would like to do it, depending on what the job is.

KL: Mmm.

JC: So...

ST: I think years ago they used to, they tended...the architects tended to use who they were happy with. But I just think, cos a the economic climate, they've been forced now where they have to go with the lowest.

JC: Yeah.

ST: But originally they would always...if always sorta...I, if they 'ad a good rapport, they got a good relationship with the contractor on site, they can leave things in the...you're trusted with, they can trust, they don't 'ave to be 'ere every 2 minutes and some. But now, just because of the err, the funding and the money themselves, they've got no choice now, I think it's just automatically just seems to go to the lowest, dun't it?

SN: Yeah.

ST: Or 95% yeah.

KL: Mmmm. Assuming there's nothing really obviously a problem... Yeah, yeah.

ST: If somebody come in low and was just like a different type of firm, that wasn't specialising in conservation then obviously it wouldn't...

KL: Yeah.

ST: But, y'know, within the conservation ranks 'emselves, it would generally go to the lowest, yeah.

KL: Uh huh. So what, what's the playground then? How would the nature of that work've been?

JC: Err, I think it was...

KL: It sounds quite different to churches.

JC: Yeah. Well we did a couple last year actually. I don't know if you've noticed, but a lot a playgrounds now are puttin' all these new, fancy equipment in...

KL: Uh huh.

JC: Err, climbing walls, and climbing frames, and different things, so...

KL: Ahh yeah.

JC: So we did a couple last year of those. Erm, I think this was along the same sorta lines.

SN: And did they invite you to tender?

JC: Yeah.

SN: OK.

JC: But at one time, y'know, sort of 3, 4, 5 years ago, you'd get 2 or 3 tenders through the post every week, without fail. Now you might be lucky if you get 2 a month.

SN: Really.

JC: Mmm.

SN: That's different isn't it? So then you are in a position where you have to go looking for work more.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

SN: What about erm, the Churches Conservation Trust?

JC: Yeah, I know the people that run that quite well, but I again, I rung them and spoke to them, and they're sayin' there's not a great deal goin' on at the minute.

SN: Really? Right. Right.

JC: So...

SN: So it's difficult.

JC: Mmmm.

SN: Where will you be after this?

JC: We've got a contract at Thornton Curtis, we've got a contract at Sprotborough, again just waitin' for the green light to come on, because they're waitin' for the funds to....be released from English Heritage.

KL: Mmm.

JC: So until they OK it all...and I though we'd a been...we've 'ad the green light maybe even before Christmas, but nothing's come of it as yet. So it might be after Easter. After the financial...

KL: Oh right yeah, go into next...

JC: Yeah.

ST: A lot a big companies've struggled that much they've folded 'aven't they?

JC: Yeah.

ST: Y'know, Quibbels was a massive concern from Hull, and they did all the St George's in Doncaster, and that was more or less the last job they did.

SN: Mmmm.

ST: They've expanded the firm and folded. Firm16GB got...the lads took a pay cut few years ago, that was the only way they kept on, and now they're goin'...they're like a management only firm now Firm16GB. They're tendin' to get rid a most a their lads, they don't 'ave that many on now.

SN: Don't they?

ST: They seem to be struggling a bit. No.

JC: Hargraves, they've got 'aven't they?

SN: Have they? W...I've not heard of Hargraves.

JC: Mmmm. They're in York.

SN: Are they? And Waites, they went didn't they? While they were on...

JC: Haven't heard a those.

SN: They were on Nostell Priory...

ST: Oh right.

SN: ...and they went while they were there?

JC: Did they?

ST: Were they do...were they on the outbuildin's? The stable block?

SN: No, no they weren't they were on the main....no, no, they were, they were on the outbuilding.

ST: Yeah. Yeah, I remember the scaffold was up cos we were on the other side.

SN: Yeah.

JC: It shows you, the sign a the times and how things...

ST: Mmm

SN: Yeah. And Linfords as well?. They were massive...

ST: Linford-Bridgman? Oh Linfords...

JC: Yeah.

SN: They've gone.

ST: Oh I didn't know that.

KL: Yeah

SN: They went the end a last year.

ST: Yeah cos, we were involved in setting up the National 'Eritage Training Group, when that was first started. And that were the first time I'd come across Linford-Bridgman and that... I didn't err...

SN: Oh really...? They've got a really good reputation...

ST: Yeah

SN: Well had...

ST: Yeh...

SN: They had like 18 apprentices that are now all displaced.

ST: Right.

JC: So 'ave you noticed a big difference, Sophie in your, y'know, doin' you research?

SN: Yeah...I mean, I think we're getting like mixed responses definitely, but erm it does seem like at first people were thinking 'ah well'... Y'know the heritage sector stays going when times get tough...

JC: Yeah.

SN: Because, y'know, old buildings always need repairing, but I think with the Olympics and the funding, public funding...

JC: Yeah.

SN: ...cuts, I think that's where it's started to make a difference.

JC: Yeah.

SN: A lot. Erm, yeah, and we're also finding that a lot of bigger companies are starting to tender for smaller jobs...

JC: Yeah.

SN: And that that's pushing the smaller companies out in some cases.

JC: Yeah.

SN: So, we've had people, yeah we've had people mention Firm16GB an awful lot, haven't we *(to KL)*.

KL: Mmm. I think the idea of that some a these bigger places a, are almost doing them at cost or less...

SN: Yeah, less than cost

JC: Yeah.

KL: Just really to y'know keep their equipment...

JC: ...heads above water...

KL: ...and labour doing something.

SN: Yeah.

KL: So err....

JC: But you can't do that forever can you?

KL: No, no.

SN: No.

JC: Cos a lot a these big companies've got big overheads. I mean, y'know, touch wood, we're lucky...

SN: Yeah.

ST: See I know Andy, Andy's gone back to Goddard's, cos Alistair Foxdale was Andy's teacher years and years ago at college...

SN: They've been taken over haven't they?

ST: Well they've been taken under the wing of GEM construction.

SN: Yeah.

ST: So they're under a construction firm that's, I think, more or less keeping them going.

SN: Oh really.

ST: You know what I mean? It's, it's...I think if they weren't 'elped out the time they were...

SN: Yeah.

ST: I think they would've gone.

SN: Right OK.

ST: But erm, you'know, they seem to 'ave a few jobs on at the minute, but I think it's because they're under their wing. They must've sort've carried through the bad times...

SN: Maybe yeah.

ST: And err they're co...they seem to be comin' out a little bit, but err....

KL: Do you do any work on newer property?

JC: Not really...now.

KL: It's all heritage....

JC: Mmm...type properties.

KL: And you wouldn't consider, sorta anything...

JC: If it came our way, then definitely, yeah.

KL: I mean that's gonna be obviously competitive as well anyway but...

JC: Mmmm.

KL: And do you think that...when you say, it's erm, well it's been competitive, but do you think you're just competing against the same people you always have then, or do you think people are coming from further around to try and get work 'round here?

JC: I think there's a lot of people comin' in, erm... What I 'ave noticed, erm, there's a lot a small builders seem to be getting' the chance to price, err...

KL: Oh right.

JC: ...contracts. And I do find it quite annoying, cos I know their not gonna 'ave the heritage skills cards.

KL: So more just general...

JC: Yeah, you know, the parish'll say 'oh we've got a local builder. Can we send them a package?'

ST: Mmm.

KL: Right.

JC: And err, 'ow can they compete with somebody like us that's got the correct insurance, got, you know, everythin' in place.

SN: Yeah.

JC: But they seem to be.

KL: And are they getting some of the work?

JC: Yeah.

KL: They are getting it?

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KL: Mmm.

ST: See we 'ad a massive problem with that in the '90s. When that was happening, and there were general buildin' firms comin' in without the qualified people. And the work that they were turnin' out was 'avin' to be redone 2 years later. And that's kicked us all off...originally, when we were goin'...we went to see Chris Smith, who was a culture minister at that time, to set up...before the National 'Eritage was set...and that was a massive concern of ours, because in them days, even then we couldn't compete.

SN: Mmm.

ST: Because, I mean, just everythin'. 'Ealth and safety issues, all the right equipment on site, and everythin', not proper trained staff, and that, and they were...and it seemed to fizzle out for a little bit, but it seems to be comin' back in a little bit now.

JC: Yeah. I mean we thought these heritage cards would kill all that, but...it's not.

SN: No it hasn't been taken seriously enough yet.

JC: We're No. Those heritage skills cards have not been taken seriously whatsoever.

ST: No, no.

SN: Not yet, no.

JC: No.

SN: No. Have you ever been asked for them?

JC: No.

SN: No.

JC: No. But it does always say in the specs now, that it's a minimum.

SN: Oh really?

JC: Yeah.

SN: Well that's positive, at least.

JC: Yeah, yeah. But nobody ever asks for them.

SN: Not even when you're tendering? Not even like a photocopy?

JC: No.

KL: But presumably you've had to tick a box to say that you've got them.

JC: No. No, it just comes in the specification, and then when you do your spec you just sign...

KL: Oh right.

JC: ...your tender, you just sign it.

KL: Mmmm.

JC: But really, you know, I think they should be on display in here...

SN: Yeah

JC: Y'know, as part of your health and safety. Bits and pieces.

KL: Mmm

SN: Yeah. Cos there's a lot of stuff that has to be isn't there?

JC: Yeah, yeah.

ST: Yeah. Cos if you went on a normal buildin' site, CSCS cards, you have to 'ave 'em...

JC: You have to show 'em.

ST: ...as part of your induction.

SN: A big one, yeah.

ST: Yeah. As soon as you go on that site you've got show 'em.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

ST: And this is only like a branch of a CSCS card int it?

SN: Yeah.

ST: But in heritage skills.

SN: Yeah.

ST: So it should be as strict.

JC: The first phase of this job was done by their local builder who they have in. They had a load of internal work done. I don't know exactly what, to what extent. I do remember we priced it maybe 3 or 4 years ago, and the job was done sort of 18 months ago by a local builder, and err... We, I mean ya drive past places to see what's 'appenin' and what's goin' off an...

SN: Mmm.

JC: ...I remember comin' past and the lads 'ave got trainers on...

ST: Mmm

JC: No hard hats, no vizzy vests... You juts think 'well, we can't compete with people like that'.

SN: No. You shouldn't have to really should you?

JC: No, no.

SN: Yeah...difficult. So the CSCS cards should be taken more...

JC: Definitely.

SN: ...seriously...

JC: Definitely. Y'know there was all that hype about them

SN: Mmm

JC: And then it...everybody did what they had to do l'm, l'm assumin', and then it all died off, you never heard anythin' else about it.

SN: No. No. Well I've tried to promote them...

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think the...

SN: Architects putting them in specs is really good.

JC: Yeah. Yeah. But what's...a lad that used to work for us erm 'e left us about 18 months ago and I got 'im his heritage skills card, and 'is father is a architect.

SN: Mmm.

JC: Erm, not far away from us. And he's now doin' work, under his father in law, on churches. 'E's got no insurance, 'e's got no drivin' license, 'e doesn't wear any health an s...I know 'e'll wear 'is boots but...well I saw 'im on a church maybe a fortnight ago, no hard hat, no vizzy vest... 'E;d 'ave no first aid or anythin'.

SN: Mmm.

JC: Cos 'e gets dropped off, with 'is tools and whatever 'e needs. I mean, it just...it's wrong.

SN: Yeah.

KL: Well it's wrong cos you haven't got a level playing field have you?

ST: That's right, no.

JC: No we haven't. And one man workin' on their own is, I think is really dangerous.

SN: Yeah, should be pairs or...shouldn't it?

JC: Yeah.

KL: Mmmm.

JC: An no vehicle. I mean, y'know, what if something happened?

SN: Mmmm

KL: So where's the responsibility? Where should that lie then? I mean is it...

JC: Well don't you think it's the architect?

KL: I was gonna say...well that's I...

JC: Yeah, yeah

ST: Yeah.

KL: Is it that kind of middle person.

JC: It's got to be.

KL: Mmmm.

JC: But they get away with it, so...

SN: Yeah. Is it the architect or is it the contractor. But if he's the contractor on his own, then it's his own responsibility I guess.

JC: Well it is. It is, but how can...y'know... It's a bit unfair of the architect givin' his son-in-law work...

SN: Mmm

JC: ...when y'know 'e's not obviously got the insurance...

SN: No.

JC: Or everythin' to back it up.

SN: Yeah that is unfair isn't it.

JC: Yeah.

SN: And, yeah

JC: And then he'll be makin' more money than us.

KL: Mmm.

JC: *Sighs*. Cos it's not got the overheads, he's not got anything.

SN: In that situation he probably hasn't had to tender has he?

JC: No

ST: No.

SN: Cos it isn't publicly funded....

JC: No. I'm sure 'e's only, 'e's not doin' major big jobs, but little repairs that we've always done.

SN: Yeah.

JC: Y'know, 'e's goin' and doin' them.

SN: Yeah. So in some senses the tender process is really useful isn't it?

JC: Mmmm. Yeah.

SN: Erm, cos it makes sure that you can have that level playing field.

JC: Yeah.

SN: Erm....I was gonna ask you about, a bit about kind of reputation. And you know how quite a lot of what erm...the architects coming to you relies on your reputation the fact that you do, you know, work, excellent work that stands the test of time.

JC: Mmm.

SN: I was wondering if you ever like erm, well I wondered A) how you kind of built your reputation, and B) if you ever marked that you ever put anything into the building that said that you'd been on site? You know like you find masons marks and lead...scratches in the lead and stuff like that...

ST: Mmm.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

SN: They have done that?

JC: Yeah.

SN: OK. What like?

JC: I know erm, I think I've seen it in lead work before.

SN: Uh huh

JC: And in certain places on the joinery work...

SN: But do you do it? Does your company do it?

JC: Yeah.

SN: Ok.

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SN: OK. That's interesting. And then about, we were gonna ask about training as well weren't we?

KL: Mmm.

SN: Err, you know, if you found it...well I spose economic climate is difficult, but what the kind of scope for training was in the company.

JC: Really, we've said this for a long, long time. We should really do quite a lot more in-house training that what we...well don't do anything.

SN: Uh huh

JC: But we should do. Erm, and we've talked about this numerous times.

SN: Uh huh.

JC: Cos obviously, I mean Vince's highly skilled.

SN: Yeah.

JC: And could show a lot a the men a lot of things. But it's all down to time.

SN: Uh huh

JC: But you know, that is something we should do.

SN: Right. Yeah.

JC: A lot more of.

SN: So training your existing staff, before even thinking about new people and stuff.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

SN: Right OK. I mean obviously you do all the health and safety stuff.

JC: Yeah, we haven't done anythin' for a while...again down to cost. We 'ave got a chap that comes in, we've not 'ad 'im in since the beginning of last year.

SN: Uh huh.

JC: Erm...you know to do a health and safety session with everybody. But again it's so expensive.

SN: Yeah. And CSkills levies don't make up for it?

JC: No, no. You know for him to come in, it's like £750 for the day.

SN: Uh huh. And no-one's working.

JC: And nobody's working.

KL: £750?

JC: Yeah.

KL: Goodness.

JC: It's a lotta money

KL: Mmmm.

JC: Just for 'er to show you a few slides.

KL: Mmmm

SN: Yeah. Mmm.

JC: You know, I did the CHAS thing last year, err to become CHAS accredited.

SN: Mmm

JC: That was long...well I started it at the end of last year, I finally got it I think about February, bout...February's now. That took me about 6 months to...

SN: Really?

JC: To get everything together, cos I mean, they go through it with a fine toothcomb.

SN Yeah.

JC: You know I think it depends who you get, who you send all your information into

SN: Yeah.

JC: But I 'ad it sent back twice.

SN: Really?

JC: Yeah, yeah.

SN: Whatabout you Steve? What are your thoughts on sorta training?

ST: Well, I mean again everythin' to do with trainin'...everythin' has a massive cost implication dunt it?

SN: Yeah.

ST: Erm...I mean I was always very fortunate at Firm15GB because it was just a...the size of the outfit, and everythin' such as that... They 'ad a massive spell where they, they sent everybody on courses. Y'know, I've been on all sorts of erm 'ealth and safety courses, 13 week courses, 5-day courses, y'know, and just stuff like that, erm...

JC: I think at one time you could get your money back...

ST: You, could, you could. I mean we use to go...they used to send us outside, we used to go and the changin', y'know grindin' wheel courses, or usin' a steel saw course, or... I mean there was course for everythin', manual handling, I've been on risk assessment courses, COSHH... But, y'know, when they send you away for a day and you've got like a day of discussing risk assessments, and what you're gonna put in... And y'know it was a proper laid out course for 'em, err so... I 'ave been on a lot of 'em in the past. I think it, it would benefit quite a few of 'em to do a few.

JC: Yeah.

ST: But obviously, you realise that, it is the cost implication.

SN: Yeah.

ST: Y'know. I mean, us older people can try and pass on the knowledge what we 'ave...

SN: Yeah.

ST: ...to the young ones, when we're working side be side...

SN: Yeah

ST: And luckily we've got a good bunch a lads who are willing to learn all the time, and they will listen. Y'know, and they do, they do take things on board. But again that comes down...that's always 'ard if you're tryin' to run a job, if you're tryin' to do a job, and then you're tryin' to show somebody...

SN: And does that slow you down?

ST: I think so yeah. If ya 'ave to go over things people, yeah. Y'know, you gotta take time to stop what you're doin' and explain 'right well this is 'ow we do it, and we don't do it this because...'. I mean it, it, it all 'as a time... Everythin' nowadays is to do with time and money, int it?

SN: Yeah.

ST: Everythin'. Which is a real terrible shame in the conservation industry.

SN: Mmmm.

ST: Because, to me it's getting' away from what you're s'posed to be achieving.

SN: Yeah

ST: Y'know, you're supposed to be conservin' somethin' for another 'undred or whatever years, and I know there's systems of works now that are done a lot differently than what we were doing a lot differently 20 odd years ago.

SN: What, just to make them faster?

ST: Yeah, anythin' that cuts down, y'know I mean we do...I mean just silly things like we, at Fountains years ago we'd 'ave water barrels on the scaffold, and as we were cutting out the whole wall would be washed down.

SN: Yeah.

ST: But that meant it run down, so you had to do the whole wall all the way to the bottom.

SN: Mmm.

ST: And it took time but it was all...it was totally dust free and it was totally ready and prepared. And then we used to tamp it all up, in all the joints, and then we used to grout everythin' so the whole wall was grouted. But, I mean that could be runnin' allover the plac...could take you days to do something. But you knew when you walked away from that wall, that wall was solid. And now, everythin' else, I mean they don't put it down in the spec, they don't, they don't, the architects don't specify it no more. Things are done differently. But I think, definitely, 20-odd years ago things were a lot...a lot sorta firmer that what they are now.

SN: And has that been like a gradual thing, since English Heritage kind of turned to FirmGB15, or...?

ST: Err.....yeah I would say so. I mean sorta, more or less from the mid-90s it started...everywhere you were goin', not matter who you worked for, or who was doin' a job, all the jobs tended to change a little bit, yeah.

SN: Really?

ST: Yeah, they 'ave yeah. Yeah, there's a lot more, there was a lot more techniques that we used to use that err, that don't get used no more.

SN: Right.

ST: You know, it's just a question of...they come in and the architect'll specify... You see, we could take a wall apart and it might say 75mm pointing, and then you cut it out, and it's totally hollow all the way through. Well in the old days, we used to grout it all and make it all solid. But now the architect'll come out 'right we'll 'ave to adjust this a little bit, right we'll deep tamp 100mm behind it and then we'll put the 75mm a pointin''. But it's still not makin' the wall solid.

SN: No.

ST: All you're doin' is ya makin' it better than you would just pointing it...

SN: Yeah

ST: But you're not makin' a solid job like ya woulda done.

SN: Is that cos grouting itself takes a long time?

ST: Everythin' yeah. It can do, groutin', yeah, yeah.

SN: Do you use those birds nest things?

ST: Yeah, clay birds nests an all that.

SN: Oh yeah, cos I've been to Romania with Henry, so...

ST: Did you go with, oh did you go with Henry? One a the lads we 'ad here, he went to Romania with Henry.

SN: Oh Really?

ST: David Duffy?

SN: Oh right, OK. It wasn't when I was there. Henry's been out loads a times.

ST: Yeah. Well it was more or less when 'e first started. Well David was in Romania with Henry, 'e's err my nephew's, come on wi me, 'e's been workin' in conservation about 7 or 8 years.

SN: Really?

ST: Yeah, yeah.

SN: And so he works here with you?

ST/JC: Yeah.

SN: Oh OK oh that's interesting.

ST: So errr...but yeah, we would do that...all them techniques...everythin' 'Enry shows you in Romania

SN: Yeah.

ST: Was the proper way of 'ow you do it.

SN: But that doesn't...cos those birds nest things must take forever.

ST: Yeah. Cos you're fillin' up one, and you're fillin' up the other...

SN: Yeah.

ST: And then it's runnin' out down 'ere, and it's stopped comin' down 'ere, and it's puttin' all the towe in...

SN: Yeah.

ST: ...an all the such...

SN: Yeah, yeah.

ST: ...but that's how they used to so it. An when we used to point years ago, you used to do all ya pointing and then they used to 'ave, I don't know whether you've seen, there's like a brass bicycle pump, and they 'ad different ends on the end, and what they used to do was, they used to fill it wi water and ya pump the syringe at the pointin', and it hits it that hard, it brings all the aggregate out.

SN: Right.

ST: But it takes a long time to do, but now to get over that, the technique 'ow they speed it all up, it's all done with like little brushes.

SN: Yeah, brushes, yeah.

ST: And it's like a little stipple brush, then a churn brush on top.

SN: Yeah.

ST: But it doesn't give ya as coarse as what it was originally.

SN: Right.

ST: But it, it's another technique, but it speeds everything up.

SN: Is it.....?

ST: you don't 'ave the water everywhere so it's not messy, cos if ya pumping water against somethin', it streaks an that, so you 'ave to keep cleanin'.

SN: Mmm.

ST: So it's just another way of speedin' it up...to achieve a simlar...

SN: Yeah...

ST: ...but it's not 'ow it woulda been done...

SN: ...at Fountains...

ST: 30 years ago.

SN: But that's quite an aesthetic thing isn't it, with the grout, but with suming like the...no, sorry with the hose...

ST: Yeah.

SN: ...and the pump.

ST: Yeah.

SN: But with suming like the grouting, that's gonna repeat isn't it, soon?

ST: Mmmm.

SN: You know, not grouting a building like that...

ST: Well yeah. I, i, i, it's never as strong is it?

SN: No.

ST: And it gets the damp, and the damp's pushing it's way through...

SN: Yeah.

ST: I mean what we 'ave found, that what they did do wrong in the 50s and 60s, particularly in the s...well it was in the '60s, when they got 'old of cement the first time...

SN: Mmm.

ST: And they started puttin' all cement into all the buildin's.

SN: Yeah.

ST: I spent the last 10 yeas cuttin' out everythin' what they put in in the '60s!

SN: Ah hah

ST: Because, where the lime allows it to breathe with the buildin', cement doesn't...

SN: Mmm

ST: ...and the stone erosion...I mean, 'ow quick it's made it go is...so we've spent like the last 10 years takin' out works they've done in the '60s.

KL: Mmmm

ST: Y'know.

ST: Which was the only bad thing they sorta used to do.

SN: Right.

ST: But they used to tha on a lot a monuments, an a lotta monuments was all...

SN: I think Lincoln Cathedral was grouted with cement..

KL: Really?

SN: Mmm

KL: Goodness.

ST: Mmmm mm

SN: In the '20s I think, earlier than that. Yeah.

ST: But I, I, I, in the 20 odd years I've been doin' it, I've noticed 'ow techniques change. Because processes were a lot slower in them days.

SN: Right.

ST: A lot slower. But again, it's all down to money int it? Y'know, if you're architect doesn't specify it, cos if 'e specifies it there's a cost implication against it...

SN: Yeah.

ST: But if 'e's not specifyin' it, you can only do what 'e's askin' you to do.

SN: Yeah.

ST: Y'know, so...

SN: S'pose... yeah... The all-important document...

ST: Yeah, it is yeah. Specification yeah.

KL: Mmm.

SN: The only other thing that we've been asking people really is about erm material sourcing and where you get your materials from. Erm, things like stone, we've cme across a couple've people that find it difficult to source matching stone, like the tufa...

ST: Yeah.

SN: And stone slates, and stuff like that.

JC: No...fine with gettin', getting' materials. Often, often with the specification they often state where they want you to get the stone from...

SN: right.

KL: Mmm.

JC: So that's somethin', and then, I mean we are lucky, we 'ave built up quite a...an accumulation of lots of sorta slates, and stone flags an things...

SN: Oh OK, so you've got some of your own

JC: So we...y'know, over the years, we've got quite a lot of bits and pieces in the yard that will often match...

ST: D, it depends where you're...like you can 'ave a stone quarry can't ya? Like Tadcaster stone, which is twice the cost of other stone that's equivalent, like ya can get that one from err, just outside Ripon, forget the name a the quarry now...Leyburn...

SN: Mmm.

JC: Yeah.

ST: Which is a similar stone, an ya can get it at 'alf the cost. Y'know, to match things. An we 'ave plenty a quarries down 'ere, cos we 'ave Cadeby, an we 'ave Warmsworth, y'know for, for limestone.

SN: Uh huh.

ST: So, this is a good area for stone sourcin' really.

JC: Mmm.

SN: What south Yorkshire?

ST: Yeah.

JC: Mmm.

SN: Right.

ST: Particularly limestone, yeah.

SN: Right OK. That's interesting. Erm, and so most of your materials come from like local places?

JC: Yeah.

SN: Right, OK.

KL: What's this roof? What's going...what's...?

JC: IT's got clay pantiles goin' on it.

KL: Clay pantiles. So that would be...local would it? You get that...

JC: Yeah, they are local yeah.

SN: From FirmRo13?

JC: Yeah, they are FirmRo13 yeah.

SN: Right.

JC: Yeah. Bridgewaters. Mmmm. Yep.

SN: Mmm, OK. Well that's about it. What about you (*to KL*)?

KL: Yeah, think so. Cos we've done quite a lot on contracting, which is more...

SN: Yeah.

JC: Ask Vince anythin'? Or...

SN: No I think we've kind of....might be nice to say hello, but...

JC: Yeah? Just shout 'im.

ST: Is 'e out there?

JC: Vince!? Vince there?

KL: (to SN) My...this thing is playing up, so...

SN: Oh OK.

KL: ...I've left it for a bit, but I'm afraid we're gonna have to rely on yours...

SN: That's OK.

KL: ...for today. I'll try an sort it out for Monday.

SN: OK. It was nice to meet you Steve.

ST: And you.

SN: Yeah.

ST: But err...so what is it...what is it you actually represent? What is...?

SN: I work for the uni...

ST: You work for the uni, York uni?

KL: Well we're both there.

ST: Right.

SN: Both at the uni.

ST: Right.

SN: But I started off working erm on an English Heritage funded project, which was like to kind of erm advocate the NHTG in Yorkshire...

ST: Right.

SN: So that's why I met Janice, over the CSCS cards and stuff...

ST: Right.

SN: ...like that. An that's how I know Henry...

ST: Yeah. 'Ave you been to any of the trainin' days at Fountains, the 3-day..?

SN: I've not been to any a them, no.

ST: I did it twice, I did it 2-years on the trot.

SN: Really, when?

ST: We 'ad a, we 'ad a stand...

SN: Oh no, that finished before I started.

ST: Yeah. Right.

SN: That one for colleges?

ST: Well it was just open days through the public and everythin', but it was through the err...

SN: NHTG?

ST: NHTG, yeah.

SN: Yeah, that finished before I started.

ST: Right, right. Cos they I know they did for 3-years...whilst I was there they did it 3-years on the trot. And I, I 'ad a stand for 2 years. But err...

SN: That must a been in, what, about 2006, 7, 8? Summin' like that?

ST: Well, no it were before...I finished in 2006, so it could be like 4, 5 and 6. Som like...that, 5 an 6, like that...

SN: 5, 6 7?

ST: Yeah, probably be one after I went, yeah. It's probably 5, 6, 7.

SN: I didn't start until 2009.

ST: Yeah.

SN: Erm, so yeah. But now, that funding ended, an now I'm working on...I'm working on 1 project to try to place apprentices....

ST: Right...

SN: ...in some a the estate teams...

ST: Right, yeah.

SN: So Dearing House, erm, one of the other ones, Coleford?

ST: Coleford? I don't know that...I know Dearing House.

SN: And Clifton College.

ST: Clifton College? That's Richardtown int it?

SN: Yeah...and I'm workin'....no it's not, it's erm...

KL: Yeah.

ST: Oh yeah, it's... yeah. I know it from goin' up white 'orse bank an that...

SN: Yeah.

ST: ...cos I did 18 months at Rievaulx...

SN: Oh really?

ST: I did a massive project at Rievaulx, yeah. It was err detailed stone conservation.

SN: Oh really?

ST: An in them days, it was knockin' off a lot a the friable stuff

SN: Mmm

ST: But then filletin' all the rest a the friable, an we did 18 months out there, and they 2-years later I saw it on calendar, and they 'ad a bloke goin' round on a rope, knockin' it all off.

SN: Really?

ST: Knockin' off all the loose thing....they'd changed the policy completely...

SN: How bizarre.

ST: From what they used to do.

SN: How bizarre.

ST: Yeah, it was a bit, bit strange. But that's me favourite Abbey that, Rievaulx.

SN: Oh is it?

ST: Yeah, I love Rievaulx.

SN: OK. I've only been to Rievaulx once.

ST: Fountains is massive, Fountains is big....

SN: Yes.

ST: But ornate is Rievaulx.

SN: Yeah.

KL: Yeah, it's more attractive.

ST: Definitely, yeah.

SN: OK. Well I haven't...do you know Byland Abbey then well?

ST: Yeah, we used to look after Byland a little bit, but err...

SN: Yeah.

ST: ...cos in them days, English Heritage...'Elmsley Castle was one of our, Middleham Castle we used to go to all the time, we used to travel between all...

SN: Amazing sites.

KL: There's a lot around there...

ST: There's loads up there, yeah. And then, cos I know John, John used to look after Jervaulx Abbey, John Maloney. Where Jervaulx was privately run.

SN: Oh really.

KL: That's right. I quite like Jervaulx.

ST: Yeah. John did a long time at Jervaulx.

KL: Mmm.

VC: I'm lost with it all.

SN: Well we just have to say hello Vince, cos we've got, we've got everything we want out of Steve and Janice.

VC: That's good. Don't need me then? *muffled* technical things then?

SN: Ha ha!

VC: *muffled*

SN: Did you ever buy that Joss thing?

VC: Nope.

SN: Didn't you?

VC: No.

SN: How come?

VC: Not a lot a jobs through really. We've lost the ones that a been involved with those, so we said we'd wait. Maybe this year. We don't know do we (to JC)?

JC: Mmmm.

VC: So I think there's other areas where there's more money.

SN: OK.

JC: So what's the changes with this job then? We've been talkin' a lot about, when you get a specification an you start a job, is there...just...is there a lotta changes to this one?

VC: Little bits, yeah.

SN: The unknowns in conservation.

KL: Mmm.

VC: Yeah, I think it's...I think with Martin it's...'e's off, so what'll do now, we'll do mock ups, what we think, photograph it an then 'e'll say yes or no. So 'e really, 'e really rely on us quite a lot actually.

KL: Is that the architect?

VC: Yeah. Quite a lot. Just supposed to give us *muffled* everythin' together. It's altered slightly cos a the degree a the pitch. An 'e wants to keep it lookin' right. So...second colour blue. Sorta blue down for paintwork.

ST: Blue and red int it? Red down pipes an blue windas.

muffled

KL: Ha haha

VC: So yeah things to change quite a lot. I think with Martin, 'e relies on our information and taki' feedback.

ST: Takin' slates off there an seein' 'ow it's actually fastened down an that. I mean first time that corner's been taken off, an just changes the detail from what they've...the drawin's that 'e's provided.

SN: Uh huh.

ST: So obviously when things change, costs change...

SN: Yeah.

ST: ...y'know the job changes, so on.

VC: I think that's where this area's gotta be kept to people like ourselves rather than building contractors getting' in.

JC: We've just talked about that...

SN: Mmm.

VC: ...an I think it's wrong...y'know...

JC: Just been sayin' about the heritage skills cards not workin'.

VC: It's not, no.

SN: No.

VC: I'm quite surprised with one architect.

SN: Which one. No. What did they say?

VC: Didn't really matter.

SN: Oh really.

VC: Mmmm.

SN: It's a shame, cos it's such a like a base level anyway.

VC: I think so yeah. Cos 'we got this'

'oh I'm not really that bothered'. It's great, but... how can you enforce it?

SN: Yeah. Err without the architects how can you enforce it?

VC: Ya can't can ya?

SN: Really.

VC: And that allows other contractors...cos obviously now it's workin' on a bid system...

SN: Mmm.

VC: So they're all advertised.

SN: Right.

JC: Yeah we've said that.

VC: Which is spoilin' it as well.

SN: An is that, is that, is that like a change in the law or something?

VC: Yes.

SN: When was that?

VC: Last year.

SN: So everything has to be advertised, it can't just be put out.

VC: 'As to be advertised on the internet, yeah.

KL: Mmm.

SN: Oh really.

VC: Or a local paper. And there's ways 'round it, where they will advertise in a local paper, an obviously you get one or two local contracts, but then they will tell you that it's bein' advertised...

SN: Right.

VC: So they'd rather, I think, keep contractors like ourselves involved, but they still 'ave to advertise it.

SN: Right.

KL: You're talkin' about particular types of jobs there?

VC: Everythin's got to be advertised. Every contract. It doesn't matter who it is. You can get someone from a...you can get a French company, a German company applyin' for it, it's advertised.

SN: Mmm.

VC: I'm sure Martin, last year, they 'ad a company involved, an I think they tried it an it was more of a management company. I think things went wrong, cos everybody was a subcontractor.

SN: Right. Well that's it...I mean we talk quite a lot about management companies...

KL: Yeah, yeah.

SN: ...with some other people, an they've said that if it is gonna be a management company, it should be somebody with conservation specialism.

VC: Yeah.

KL: Mmm, mm.

VC: And there's none ar...I think Firm16GB 'ave gone to more management...

ST: Mmm.

VC: But I think that's to jump onto the new building and I think...

ST: Yeah, they 'ave.

VC: ...major projects.

KL: Mmmm

SN: Yeah.

VC: So they were strugglin' for the work.

KL: Mmmm.

SN: Yeah.

VC: They were findin' it 'ard. But then again there's companies undercuttin'...

SN: Yeah.

KL: Yeah.

VC: ...which, which we're 'aving' trouble with n...they go in really cheap, an we can't survive. Mmm...it's a York company that are undercuttin' everybody.

JC: They've been to see 'im.

ST: Mentioned 'im.

VC: Which is not good. It's not good.

SN: No.

VC: It's appalling. Cos we can't match the wages 'e's payin' for people. And they've not got the skills cards like we've got... Not UK trained are they? Conservation, so...

SN: Some a them are. They're not all...

VC: 'E's not got many though. Mostly Germans aren't they?

SN: Well we met an Australian and 4 English guys.

KL: Mmm.

VC: Mmm.

SN: I mean 2 of his guys are brothers and 1 of them won a big award in London for being the best apprentice of the year.

VC: Mmm.

JC: Oh that's interestin'.

SN: Yeah.

VC: *muffled* then

SN: I know there was that article in the paper about him and that issue, but...

VC: Well I've not seen anythin'.

SN: Oh really.

VC: No.

SN: Oh right...

VC: Ahhh.

SN: But no, he considered it slander, like it was another craftsperson.

VC: Mmm. I think 'e's riled a few cos 'e obviously claims to sorta be the best mason around...

ST: Oh 'e's definitely riled a lot a people in our industry.

SN: Mmm.

ST: Definitely.

VC: We got that Mark Blood who does quite a lot for us, he's a good, very good sculptor, with the window work as well as everythin' else, but 'e says, y'know, 'e's...we're sorta more elite than 'e is. I think there is a cash. Hmmm...but that's conservation work.

SN: The conservation world. So small...

VC: It is, yeah. And I think everyone's gotta stick together. An 'e's not, not stickin' with that. An I think 'e's upsettin' people. That's why that article'll've been written, is it? Upsettin' a lot a companies.

SN: It was ages ago now. It must've been about 3 years ago.

VC: Well 'e's beatin' us on jobs, and we just can't, can't contend with it. No way. So I think probably...for the York companies, what they'll do I don't know. Like Goddards, cos...they're 'avin' to travel...

ST: Yeah.

VC: More than we are.

ST: Yeah they are, yeah.

VC: Anyway...

SN: Do you know of Firm03SM?

VC: Yeah.

ST: Yeah.

SN: We spoke to them as well and they didn't mention anything like that.

ST: Didn't they?

SN: No. *(to KL)* They didn't did they?

KL: I don't remember anything...

SN: No. They said that they were steady. But not growing, but steady.

VC: Yeah we're steady...

JC: Yeah, yeah.

VC: But more could be won. You just can't...you're 'avin' to pick ya jobs. 'Opefully someones not...

JC: You're 'avin' to buy ya jobs in...

VC: We've bought a few...

JC: ...but then you've got no room for, you know, error, or...

KL: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: That's what I'm sayin'.

VC: It's definitely spoilin' the work. Cos I mean, when you're workin' to a budget, and you're specialise, and you've gotta...go *muffled* a little bit.

JC: Y'know, you've only got to have 2 weeks of bad weather.

SN: Mmm.

JC: That can throw ya out as well.

KL: Yes.

JC: Apart from any mistakes.

VC: I think things are getting tight, plus I think focus with architects, they've gone onto sorta modern methods where it's rushed, you gotta schedule, and it's wrong...

ST: Just like that...yeah, yeah.

VC: It's really wrong. I mean it's not a proper job, conservation, it takes its time.

SN: Yeah.

VC: If somebody says 'well you're on the site...this one you're on for 16 weeks, after that we're not 'appy'...

SN: Uh huh.

VC: Y'know it's...I mean Botesford...

ST: Mmmm.

VC: ...we were OK there weren't we?

ST: Yeah.

VC: They accepted it...that was a big change in the contract.

ST: That's what, like on day 1 when we put the 'ammer an chisel in an the job changed. That was Botesford. And it 'appened, we just...everythin' changes then dunt it?

KL: The architects you work with, do they tend to specialise in conservation?

VC: Yeah.

KL: So, they should...

VC: They're all in that area, yeah, yeah. But still they've got the devil *muffled* cos...

SN: Do you think that because you're a company that does the whole building, not just...you know, lots of companies specialise, erm, that you can deal more easily with that kind of time thing?

VC: A lot easier...

SN: The deadline.

JC: *muffled*

VC: A lot easier, yeah.

SN: Mmm. Cos everybody else we've spoken to 'as been a specific craft specialism...

JC: Yeah.

VC: Yeah.

SN: And I think at least once, or maybe a couple a times, people 'ave talked about the difficulty of workin' on construction sites, where you know, there's lots a different companies, and they're in an out at different times, an that makes the act of conservation much, much more difficult. Erm..so yeah.

VC: I think it does benefit cos we can react a lot quicker.

ST: Yeah.

VC: Plus we 'ave got a lot a knowledge...

ST: Ya can re-programme, we can re-programme yaself...

SN: You can re-programme, yeah.

ST: You come across a wall that's got to be taken down, it's holdin' up the roof trusses, where if ya got the joiners in-house...

SN: Mmm.

ST: An you can...so ya can send them to do somethin' else, where an outside firm 'ad just come an say 'I want that doin', I want that doin''. An as soon as you say no you can't get on to it because a that, like...it's not our fault, yours. Y'know, if we're stood....somebody's gonna 'ave to pay.

KL: Mmm mmm.

ST: Where if it's in-'ouse, you can restructure things a lot easier can't you? Definitely.

VC: Yeah.

SN: And you can talk to each other as well, so you can say 'oh we're gonna be on that in a couple a days time, can I check it, make sure...'.

ST: Yeah, yeah.

VC: I think with Steve's background and mine, 2 different in 1 respect isn't it? So I can...Steve will do 'is area and I'll say...such as this one today, we've got an issue. We can respond quicker, rather than waitin' for a subcontractor... They're just gonna say 'well we need to do this'.

SN: Mmm mmm

VC: Where we're straight on it, an it's...within that date it can be sorted.

SN: You're a lead roofer aren't you Vince?

VC: Yeah, originally yeah.

SN: Right OK.

VC: Yeah.

SN: How did you train?

VC: I started work at 15, roofin'. I'm actually a tiler by trade, on building sites.

SN: OK.

VC: And then developed from there

SN: Right OK, I see.

VC: It's just a way forward.

SN: But you went into an apprenticeship at 15?

VC: Well...

Interruption

SN: You did an apprenticeship?

VC: No. No, not an apprenticeship. That cost money.

SN: Oh really?

VC: I worked for my father so straight onto the sites, and then straight onto the churches.

SN: Oh you worked for your dad?

VC: Yeah.

SN: OK

VC: Yeah, just given a book and learned from there.

SN: Right OK.

VC: The old method.

KL: Mmm.

VC: Trainin' cost money. So you've gotta be on site...

SN: Yeah.

VC: College you don't earn any money for us. That's what it used to be.

SN: Right.

VC: An that's the way now with apprenticeships. No-one's gonna taken them on cos you can't afford anybody in college. They gotta be workin'.

SN: Mmmm.

VC: Cos we though about getting' an apprentice this year, but it's just a cost. Cos I think a lot a the apprentices aren't too bothered on what they want to do, they've not got that sorta...

SN: Yeah...

VC: ...thought. I think older people are better now.

SN: Well we...I want to talk to you about this a little bit, and it's not really part a the research, but the other...you know I said I was workin' on that apprenticeship project?

ST: Yeah.

SN: Erm, the other one I'm working on is like, it's called a building bursary project, and what it can do is place somebody with a company erm for up to a year, normally 3 months to a year...

VC: I think you sent summit through last year dint ya?

SN: I pro...yeah I probably did...

VC: Ya did yes, on the bursary, yep ya did...

SN: Erm, we can't...I mean there's one, one scheme being run already, but there's hardly been anything in south Yorkshire, erm, there's only been one. And it would be really good with your, like with your skills, and the person you would recruit, and they would be err already to certain level. There's no age restriction or anything like that.

VC: Right.

SN: They don't have to go to college or anything...and erm they might already've got like a level 3 bricklaying or whatever...

VC: Yes.

SN: And they might be 30, they might be 35. It would be up to you and the kind of the applicants that you got. And then they would be employed by the centre, so that's the erm National Heritage Training Group, and they would claim their money back from the National Heritage Training Group, but they would just come here to work, if you know what I mean?

VC: Right, yeah.

SN: And so all you would have to do is like insure them, and then err erm, teach them, train them a bit.

JC: Give them some of your knowledge.

SN: Yeah, exactly.

VC: Errr, I think there is people out there that are willin'.

SN: Yeah.

VC: I mean even like this job, it's not a, a 'eritage job, but it's...

ST: No.

VC: There's thing to be learnt as well on this, you know for a joiner.

SN: Yeah.

VC: This building.

SN: So would that be something that might interest you?

JC: Yeah, yeah.

VC: Send the information through.

SN: I will. It's not quite ready yet. It won't be ready 'til like April, but I'd really like to place somebody with you.

KL: How long would they be placed for?

SN: Up to a year.

KL: Oh right.

SN: So it's up to you to decide. 3 months to a year really. And, and it would probably depend on their existing skill level, so if you went for somebody that say had a level 3 and was erm in their...had been workin' on site for like 20 years then maybe they'd only need 6 months to pick up some skills...

VC: Yeah.

SN: But if you went for somebody a bit younger that needed to pick up a bit more, then maybe it would be a year

JC: Yeah.

SN: It would kind of be up for everyone to decide.

JC: Yeah.

VC: It's definitely an area...

JC: Yeah, send it, send somethin' through to us.

SN: OK. I will when it's ready.

JC: Yeah.

SN: But it would be really good to place somebody here, because, as I say, we don't have many is south Yorkshire.

JC: Yeah. OK.

SN: Just as long as the work keeps coming through.

JC: I know.

SN: And that's the other thing, it might be easier to commit to...

Neville Arterton, Firm13Ro. February 9th 2012

SN: So, I'm gonna start off by introducing us.

NA: OK.

SN: It is February the 9th 2012, Sophie Norton and Kim Loader talking to Neville Arterton at Firm13Ro. Erm, the reason we 're here is we're kind of coming together on this research project to look at erm conservation and the wider supply chain, and how that impacts on Yorkshire-based crafts companies.

NA: Uh huh.

SN: So we've talked to lots of small craft companies and builders, but you're kind of err unique so far in that you're the first manufacturer that we've spoken to. We've just...we've really started off by asking people erm a bit about the skills in the company, and how they came to acquire those skills. Erm, so I was wondering if you could tell us a bit about how you came to do what you do, but also a bit about erm Frank and Jeff, and how they got how they are as well.

NA: Uh huh. Yeah.

SN: And anyone else that you think is...you know the guy that you think is...I've never met him actually...but the guy who does the tile...who makes the handmade tiles basically.

NA: Right yeah.

SN: On the machine, the really old machine.

NA: Yeah, well we 'ave erm y'know quite varied types of staff that we have, y'know sorta the operatives as we call them.

SN: Uh huh.

NA: Craftsmen really, what they should be. Erm, I mean personally, meself, I'm from an engineering background. Err, I sort of stumbled into what I'm doing more or less by request. Y'know, I used to work on the engineerin' side as a draftsman y'know, design the tiles, the machinery, equipment and such things. But we used to get err quite a lot of erm requests, where people'd say well 'you make the tiles, can you make these special ridges, special fittin's'. And it came to a point that y'know we were getting' that many requests, cos no-one else would really envisage doin' em, cos everybody's mass product, production, even though we still do that 'ere, and it became a point in the company where we said

'well let's see if we can make this as a side line', and y'know, see if we can use it as erm sort of, not only just a marketin' tool for the company, but a production tool, y'know, that there's another side to the company. And that's where we up to this moment, y'know. It's me...we've been over 16, nearly 17 years we've been doin' the heritage service. Y'know, it sort of...it's fairly well established now. We're, we're known throughout the industry as the people you go to if you want somethin' doin'. Y'know...I've only ever refused 2 jobs.

SN: Really.

NA: And erm one a those was because the client wanted somethin' impossible. And the other one was because erm. I didn't think it was feasible really. It was...what they were after, the cost, it was not worth...us botherin' with. Sayin'

that, we 'ave done some jobs that we've not really made any money from. We've done it for the prestige, or we've done it as a favour. For some people, y'know we've done, we're doin' some special finials at the moment, which are done errr as presentation items that are bein' given to famous people who, erm, 'ave worked with us or 'ave erm sort of y'know in the industry, we try an help people recommendation. We did an award for somebody winnin' the OBE, so we did a little clay OBE for 'im...

KL: Ohh

SN: OK.

NA: And present it wit 'im, and apparently 'e cried in 'is office. Cos 'e didn't expect 'e was gettin' something like that. 'E thought it was really neat that somebody 'ad, 'ad bothered, y'know. An 'e was, 'e was a long term in the roofing industry 'e's been involved y'know. Things like that we just...doesn't really take us much effort, but we *muffled* people, makes 'em appreciative, and, and it does extol the benefits of what clay looks like, and 'ow we love it an hopefully other people understand that. On the erm the sorta the company side, erm, because the, the, the sorta business 'as developed, and y'know we, we get the demand...y'know we do have a fairly high turnover now, y'know we are a erm, only a small amount of what is a huge conglomerate that we w...we're sort of a part of now.

SN: Yeah.

NA: But we do get some very good recognition, y'know, the erm status of the work we do, erm y'know, drags in client, clientele that look at what we do, err what standard products we make, and actually it gives 'em a different angle of what we are. They understand that we're not just a mass manufacturer, we do do bespoke items, we will look at something that's non-standard.

KL: Mmm

NA: And y'know, we try and help people out, especially in historic buildings, y'know, where a lot of profiles aren't made anymore.

SN: No.

NA: You know, there woulda been y'know local vernacular up and down the country, that we sorta knew existed, y'know, people've got 'em on their roofs, y'know the roofs need replacing. So, they, they've, y'know, obviously they need a choice, what to do, y'know. Can they replace like-for-like, or will some sort of similar material have to do? And if you do that similar material, you lose the original material.

SN: Mmm.

NA: And so it changes the make-up, and that, not just that buildin', the village they're in, the town... Y'know, it's...

SN: Mmmm

NA: ...whole history, gets lost, one by one. Like, you wouldn't allow a stone cottage in the middle of a housin' estate to disappear, just because it didn't fit in. You'd keep that because of its, y'know, originality. And that's were we try and help out, y'know, with people who y'know 'ave these bespoke roofs and they wanna keep it. And, y'know, sometimes, the cost y'know is, y'know, it can be quite expensive to do, to manufacture a bespoke product. But, people do want that, they wanna keep their buildin's like that.

SN: Uh huh.

NA: Which is very y'know sort of honourable of 'em. And I don't think it's so much because of the planning, where they... y'know literally, if you've got a grade 1 building that, that is what you 'ave to do it like-for-like. There's no other sort of basis for that. But people, because they see, and it's there, they see their buildin', it's original, and they think 'oh well, I'd like to keep it like that'. And thankfully 'hopefully we play a part in that, y'know in help...in that industry.

Erm, for the actual works that we have, the operatives, erm, we do an awful lot in-house. Y'know, they actually learn on the job.

SN: Uh huh.

NA: Y'know they might have, erm, a sorta leanin' towards makin' those tiles, those fittin's, you can s...you can very quickly learn after a couple a days if somebody's got the knack to do it.

SN: OK.

NA: There is a certain knack to makin' anythin' in clay, erm, and what we do, we sorta learn 'em...we start 'em off on somethin' very rudimentary, very simple, like a ridge. Y'know a half round ridge or a hump back ridge. Erm they might start pff by manufacturin' them, y'know they'll work on them, they'll 'ave a low tally at first to start with, just to get 'em into the swing of it...

SN: Mmmm

NA: But we'l gradually expect 'em to increase that tally until they're hittin' a target which, y'know, everybody else would make.

SN: Uh huh

NA: An, an if people can do that and they can sustain it over a few weeks, you think right, you move 'em on, to see if they can do the next... y'know sort of the fittin' that might be a bit, slightly more, more difficult. Which is normally a bonnet 'ip, or a valley or an arris 'ip, or an angle, y'know an external angle on a building, things like that they'd take a bit more care about, a bit more you y'know sorta time. Where ridges are very simple...it's, essentially you put a bat a clay around the former, you beat it, you wire it off, sand it, and you place it on a board and it's...there's not a lot else to it. Where, makin' a bonnet...you've got to cut that bonnet in a certain, certain way otherwise, if you slice it with a bore on the front edge, you may get a thicker edge than what you need, or a thinner edge than what you need, or you might just not be able to make it or place it into the tray exactly how it should be. It dries a certain way so it, you know, sort of develops into the roof. So, it's, there's things like that that people you sort of, they either pick up or they don't.

SN: Mmm.

NA: You can teach people, you can say 'right you're gonna be doin' it like this'. But they mightn't be able to do it, but not err y'know, sorta comprehensive rate. Y'know they might only be able to make 100 a day, where a good person'd make 200 a day. And they'd do it quite easily really. Y'know, they'll do their tally and 'ave plenty a time to spare, an y'know, it's y'know, you see all the time that's how people develop. Once we get people who can do everythin' we, we try an advance 'em then and say 'right, we'll take you, make you, let you make a finial'. Y'know, do you *muffled* cos we

make all our finials by hand, we don't cast any erm...we do some mouldin', like our ball tops we mould 'em, but we finish 'em by hand, and we join 'em by hand. So we, we just make 'em in 2 halves, and we use a fork an, an err, sort of crease the tile keyer up, add some clay, and join it, and then finish 'er off, so... There's an awful lot of work we still do do by hand, an we wouldn't really change from that because it gives a different look, y'know, and people are appreciative of that. So, they go on from makin' a finial, err, then maybe they might come across to the err 'eritage side, and we might start 'em off on a project that...they might be makin' unders and overs, they might be makin' bespoke pan tiles, bespoke ridges, bespoke plain tiles. All sorts of fittin's that we do...er, they sort of, they're y'know experienced enough that you could leave 'em to do that, but even then for years they're still learnin' the craft of how we have to have sort of manipulate the clay. There's certain tiles that we make where you might just 'ave to pull the edge of it slightly, or you lift it up with what we call a tamper, an erm y'know we 'ave a little erm dealin' horse, that you'll go in, you'll pick a tile up a certain way, but you 'ave to sort of flip it and have a look at it, and then put it back, and if they slip it slightly wrong after puttin' it back on the dealin' horse, it can just misshape it. An it's just that...it's like someone tossing a pancake, you know, if you get it right you can do it without even looking but y'know they flip it and they put it back, and if they get it wrong, it just slightly deforms it. They put it in the, in the, in the frame to dry an if you put it in slightly wrong, before you know it...if they're doin' that wrong all the time, they could've made 500 pantiles in a day, an they're all wrong. All just from a slight miscalculation on the *muffled* So there's still, you're always learnin', everyday you're learnin' somethin' new, y'know, sort of, the clay acts a bit funny, ya think 'what's 'appenin' there...is it?'. Like we've 'ad problems last year with the snow...

SN: Mmm

NA: The snow was addin' more moisture into the clay, so we 'ad to adjust the moisture level in the clay, make sure that the tiles weren't too wet, and the clay wasn't too wet. If the clay's too wet you can't make ya tiles. If it's too dry you can't make tiles. There's a balance you gotta...an it's that craft that you learn on the job...

SN: Mmmm.

NA: ... y'know it is that erm sort of in-house sorta knowledge that you, you pick up.

SN: So do you take on people from straight out of school say?

NA: We don't really erm pick up a lot of y'know sort of young people. We're very rural here..

SN: Uh huh.

NA: ... y'know so, it's obviously y'know if they're not old enough to drive...

SN: Yeah.

NA: It's difficult for 'em to get 'ere. Y'know, even though the village is only a couple a miles away. Err if they come on a bike y'know they, y'know they can but...we don't really...we've 'ad the odd 1 or 2 who are young when they start wiv us, and things like that, but sometimes it's a bit too hard work. Y'know, an they drift off somewhere else, or they might go back to school, y'know...

KL: Mmmm.

NA: ...'oh I'm back to 6th form or summit...'.. And we've 'ad that over the time, so it's erm, it's challengin' sometimes getting' the right people. I mean, personally we'd, we're startin' to look at y'know we could do wiv an apprentice who would, would pick up, the next few years, we could sort of learn, y'know learn somebody over years, say a decade or so. Say

'learn this'. Y'know, you can y'know 'ave the time to sit wi somebody and learn it, but even though somebody can shadow somebody an learn it, they've got to do it.

SN: Yeah.

NA: Y'know they've got to be hands on, they've got ta try it, because even then on some of the projects we do, we, we need people who are a bit artistic in their sorta temperament. They need to be able to image how something needs to look, especially some a the carvin' that we do. Y'know we're, we're the only manufacturer that does hand carvin' of finials, y'know we, we've done quite a lot a projects where we'll make a bespoke finial an y'know it'll 'ave quite intricate detail so we've carved it out in...y'know we do that by hand in..erm so they're not all the same. Y'know, and that's what the client wants. They want an individual sort of a look. So, y'know, you can't teach somebody to be an artist, they, they've got it in 'em. They've got that sort of...y'know they might a been skillful at school, y'know doin' y'know sketchin' or a bit a modellin', and it, it's sort of....rememberin' what you've learnt and sort of puttin' that into a context y'know with the clay...I mean I was quite a good artist when I was younger meself, err and I can work in 3D, I, I y'know I visualize 3D all the time because I use CAD, an so I know how depth should be, perception an things like that. But even I would find it hard workin with the clay, you still...you've gotta think 'right, how much y'know do we need to take off?'. And it's quite a good material to work wiv cos you can add bits on, take it off. It's...in stone, if you take it off, it's gone, that's it you've changed...

SN: Yeah.

NA: ...that block of stone. It's, y'know it's changed forever. Wiv clay, we can add a bit back in y'know it's like plasterscene, you can build up, build up y'know? To a certain extent y'know it's a...you can't go too big because ya...it becomes unmanageable err...and you've gotta sort of always be mindful that you've gotta fire this product...

KL: Mmm.

NA: Wiv stone, you don't 'ave to worry about it. It's there, it's made, as long as it's the right sort of stone to go wi the project then you're OK, but if...in clay, we've got to make sure that it's hollow enough that you can fire it. Because if it's not hollow erm the, the, you don't get all the moisture outta the clay, not matter 'ow...even if you left it...we've 'ad finials that we did once, err and they was 6 month waitin' to go in a kiln to 'ave specific firin', and one of 'em, they hadn't hollowed it out enough, and we lost it.

SN: Oh no.

NA: An you think 6 month it's been dryin', it'll be dry...

SN/KL: Mmmm

NA: ...it doesn't. Clay retains its moisture, until eventually you can...you cracked it all out, or make it sorta hollow enough that it's a nice body that will fire consistently. So even y'know some a the finials that we made really intricate, you've literally gotta, y'know, somebody gets their hand inside an scrapes it out by hand. Y'know we don't, don't make a core like a, like a castin', or anythin' like that, we...an it's that knowledge of knowin' how much to take out, how much to leave so it doesn't collapse, or breakthrough the surface, as you do that, and things like that...erm y'know learn by your mistakes or y'know...just you get it right an it's fingers crossed it goes in the kiln an it's, it's OK so... We might spend months makin' something, and then you can lose it in y'know 7 days in a kiln.

SN: Hmmm.

NA: So it's erm, it is a bit challengin' and that...but that's sort of a brief summary of what er, y'know we 'ave to deal wiv, y'know....the people...

SN: Yeah. So when you take people on, if they're not straight out of school, then what kind of experiences do you look for? Or y'know qualifications or....

NA: Well we've erm, I mean I've just recently took 2 people on in the heritage service, err last year. 1 of 'em was a temporary worker, and 'e'd 'ad no experience workin' wiv clay, 'e'd worked on construction sites all 'is life...

SN: Uh huh

NA: ...and then 'e got made redundant d'you know when the crash...sort of happened. An y'know 'e'd been, done a multitude of jobs on site, was a real hard worker. Very keen to, y'know cos 'e'd been out of work for 6 month, an y'know and 'e'd really 'ad...and 'e was y'know keen to learn, y'know. An we seen 'e 'ad 'is erm, 'e 'ad a temperament to sorta graft, which is good in itself, y'know you can get enough numbers of what you need out. But 'e also erm was bothered about what 'e made, 'e was a bit, y'know 'e 'ad a good eye for things, an to look at 'im you wouldn't think that. Y'know, 'e's got tattoos all over 'im 'an is about as rough as they come, but 'e's an absolute great worker. An 'e's, 'e's learnt it an 'e's actually, every time 'e does sommt now 'e's askin' questions, like well 'am I doin' this right, should I be doin' this?'. An it's 'e's not just workin', 'e's, 'e's a craftsman now. Y'know because 'e's, what 'e's learnin', 'e's takin' over to the next job, 'E said 'well, oh I remember when we did this', y'know 'that dried a bit funny, so I altered it to do this'. So 'e, sort of 'e's learnin' as 'e goes along, which is what you want. Where the other lad 'ad worked for us for years, erm, an really just worked as a normal operative in the factory, but 'e come across, an 'e's a bit more, got a bit more finesse than the first lad. 'E's, 'e's got a bit more of an eye. But 'e's steadier, 'e's a bit slower...

SN: Oh OK.

NA: So you've got one who's a really quick worker, but can be a bit rough at times. Where the other one's a bit slower, but real detai..you don't 'ave to really worry about too much what 'e does. An it's tryin' to get a balance of that, where you, you, you need to make a certain amount because y'know these are high, premium items, so you need to make as many as ya can to make the price as low as possible, cos y'know if ya, if you make 150 rather than 100 a day, it does affect the price usually. Y'know there's a 50% difference there y'know, so we, we try and get that balance, an we try and sorta pick up on who can do certain jobs, so then you allocate say

'well, he might be best to do this job. He might be best doin' that'. But they're capable a doin' everythin' but you're tryin' to mix 'em about every now and again, and 'opefully learn off each other, as well as what Frank, me erm, me chargehand, y'know the head craftsman, what he learns 'em. Y'know so 'e looks after 'em, an 'e's very particular about what 'e does, 'e's more particular than me at times. And, y'know 'e'll sorta say, if 'e's not 'appy 'e'll say 'I'm not 'appy wi this'. Y'know we'll...and we're not scared to throw things away, y'know say 'no they go in the skip'.

SN: Mmm.

NA: They get recycled, y'know, made into clay tiles later on, y'know. So we, we're quit erm finicky in that respect, we, y'know, we expect y'know them to be right, we're not happy with y'know a half way house. It's gotta be right, where....sometimes in mass production you can y'know if it's...it's OK, it's OK'...

SN: Mmm

NA: But in, in err obviously an aspect where you're y'know you're doin' a premium item, an it's for y'know a grade 1 buildin', it has to be right, y'know there's no ifs and buts, y'know, the colour, the shape fits... It's gotta be right cos y'know that project might have scaffoldin' up there that costs an awful lotta money an if it's not right, you've y'know...

SN: Mmm.

NA: That scaffoldin' stays up another 6 months an it's an expensive mistake, so...

SN: Yeah.

NA: So we expect everythin' that leaves in y'know in top condition, and erm y'know, I 'ave pulled things back off a lorry cos y'know I've seen something an said 'oh I'm not 'appy with that'. We've taken off lorry that goin' to site, said 'well we'll 'ave to tweak this, an do this an that...'. So erm, y'know we do sort of look at things like that as well.

SN: OK.

KL: Did you take 'im on on a temporary basis just because you thought that was the amount of work you had, or was it like a...was that a trial?

NA: Yeah, we 'ad erm...we 'ad a large project erm in south London, it was 17 buildin's that were bein' restored. Erm, getting' completely renovated err the roofs were bein' redone...it's err for the Red Cross, it's their world head quarters.

KL: Right.

NA: It's a huge site in err South London. And we 'ad to make basically 180,000 under and over tiles in y'know maybe, it was like 18 months. 'E wanted 'em all that period, err so we decided we were gonna take 10 people on, to do that, just 1 project. So we....what we did, we utilised some a the staff in the factory who we were knew they were capable of doin' things, took 'em off other jobs, an then the temporary staff come in an replaced them. But we actually used...

KL: Right.

NA: ...some a the staff on. Because within a week some of 'em were showin' promise.

SN: Mmm.

NA: Ya think, well they've picked it up really quick. And y'know you get times where other factories need a bit a help, so those people'll go back. So the temporary workers come in, an you just...it is a question of fingers crossed, see 'ow they get on. An because we 'ad 10 different people makin' it, we could actually, what we did, we got 'em to stamp up

an individual marker on each a the tiles, so each maker from number 1 to number 10, was actually number 10, 1 to 12 because 2 people were rotatin'. So...an we could actually analyse y'know throughout the week who was makin' good tiles, an whose needed a bit of help, just said 'well you need to do this', an... We 'ad to colour 'em in a specific colour as well.er to suit the plannin' sorta regulations. It had to 'ave a certain blend of colour on. So we 'ad to ensure that this blend of colour, because we had a, a conservation officer who was very, very, very erm particular, y'know, err... He held the project up for 6 weeks while 'e was waitin' for us to get this blend right. Y'know, it was a multi million pound project and 'e was

'no, no there's not enough green there, not enough green here, an'... And we had to change things an send 'im that, an 'e said 'yeah, OK that's fine', so...those people erm sort of y'know that we took on that actually y'know were moved onto this job, an on this they sort of, they proved 'emselves, an of those 10 that we took on....we actually took 16 people in total on at that time, an the others got used up in the factory. Erm, but of the 10 who came workin;' for us, there's only actually 1 that's not workin' here any more.

SN: Oh really?

NA: Which is great, y'know, it's quite good to be able to take staff on an y'know...

SN: Keep them.

NA: Keep them, yeah.

SN: How old are they all?

NA: Oh they varied. We 'ad...I think the youngest was 'e'd be about, ooh 21, little Sam, yeah 'bout 21 Sam is. And we 'ad some they were in their 50s.

SN: Right OK.

NA: Y'know we dint, we didn't sorta say 'young lads because they, they've got no problems, they come...'. Y'know. The younger they are, the harder they are. Y'know, somebody who's middle aged is more likely to work a bit harder than somebody who's younger, y'know, shouldn't be, but it is...

SN: Mmm.

NA: That's our *muffled* they've got other, other things they 'ave to provide for...getting' up in a mornin' is more of a motivation for them, an we, we, we 'ad a real varied age, which we do across the factory, we 'ave some people who are just about to retire, we just took another bunch of err temporary workers on recently, in the last few weeks...

SN: Right.

NA: So we've had another 12 come in makin' handmade tiles. Y'know so we're, we're constantly takin' 'em on, I mean we, because it's such erm a difficult market at the moment, construction industry, we're havin' periodic areas in the factory where we'll stop makin' them tiles cos we've got enough stock, and then we'll make some other tiles. So they've to be flexible doin' that...

KL: Mmmm

NA: Y'know if we were full capacity and everybody was makin' everythin', then we're need even more, *muffled* just to keep everythin' goin' y'know.

KL: So you say you've taken more on just recently, even though things are a bit difficult...?

NA: Yeah even though sort of...

KL: But you're not up to full capacity?

NA: We're not no, no. I mean I don't think any manufacturer is in construction, it's...

KL: Right.

NA: Err, we're doin' very well y'know, we're, we're y'know, last year was very good for us, and the year before was considerin' the, the market. But we 'ave such a diverse range of tiles. We're not jut...we don't just make plain tiles...

KL: Yeah.

NA: Some manufacturers would just make plain tiles, that's all they make. Where if that plain tile market gets hit hard, then...

KL: Mmm, mmm.

NA: You know they've got no back up, where we make pantiles, plain tiles, we make large format tiles, which are used in a lot of social housing schemes, y'know council estates, that type a thing.

KL: Mmm

NA: Erm, a lot of new build stuff as well. Y'know we, we obviously 'ave the concrete side to the company, y'know they make concrete tiles. We 'ave a slate side to the company, so they, they make slates. So, we, we 'ave the largest range in the world of any manufacturer of tiles...we, y'know we're contsantly evolvin' and y'know developin' new tiles which we are doin' at the moment. Y'know. Erm s, we, we, we...we sort of 'ave to take the staff on as we need 'em, y'know, and it's erm...

KL: Mmm. So do you have, do you always have a mix of say permanent and say temporary? Or...to allow for this...

NA: We never have, we never have until sorta the last couple a years really. Last 3 years. Because, mainly because, we 'ad a period where y'know when the crash happened, and it was literally, it hit everybody hard..

SN: Mmm.

NA: I mean we...I knew 4, 4 companies that really were on the edge, y'know they were actually struggling. Cash flow and things like that.

KL: Mmm

NA: One a the companies we deal with in France who make a lot a the equipment we use here, they've run outta money. Cash flow. They collapsed.

SN: Really.

NA: An they were a billion pound company. Cos they 'ad no cash flow, cos nobody was buyin' equipment...

KL: Yes, yeah.

NA: ..or openin' new factories. So instantly, just boomf, they went. Got split up between all different companies, bought out and... Err, so but, an we didn't really 'ave sort of temporary workers erm, but then we 'ad to make quite a few redundant. So 50 people got made redundant at that point.

KL: 50?

NA: Yeah.

KL: Just on this site, or more broadly...?

NA: Just on this site, yeah. Just on this site cos y'know we're quite, we 'ave 3 and a half factories really. We have here. So it was all...the company was like a bit, y'know you know that nobody ever wants to make anybody redundant.

SN: No.

NA: S...y'know quite a lot were voluntary, they went erm elsewhere, some retired. And things like that. But it was come to the point where, y'know if you're gonna get busy, an...but we all don't know what the market's gonna do. Don't know what's gonna 'appen.

SN: No.

NA: 1 month to next, nevermind 1 year to the next. So the company obviously y'know had to take the policy where we, we take people on, and then if we can keep 'em we keep 'em.

KL: Mmmm.

NA: If not, y'know, the contract comes to the end, and then...when we're ready again, they'll come back, an we 'ave done that, a couple a times we've 'ad people in for maybe 6 weeks, then they've gone off for a week, an then they'll come back for 6 month.

KL: Mmm.

NA: And that's...we took some on. And then, y'know we've y'know some've gone who y'know probably not suitable. Erm, and that's...it's a bit like that until ya...'til the market y'know the whole industry gets back on its feet again. It's, it's gonna be very challengin' with y'know staffin' levels an...it is difficult in that respect.

SN: 'Ave you seen...a big drop off in the heritage section since 2009 err 8?

NA: Erm, no I've been busy than ever actually, frankly. It's erm...

SN: Right.

NA: ...it's seems with those projects, a lot of 'em already they'd got the fundin' in line. Been sort of they'd been worked at. So, y'know we 'ave been constantly, constantly busy over that period. Y'know we've actually expanded y'know, 'ad sort of a....at 1 point err 2 years ago I 'ad 17 people workin' just specifically on heritage jobs.

SN: Right.

NA: Where before it used to be 1.

SN: Right.

NA: Used to be 1 person who'd be doin'...which was Frank. Y'know 'e'd do everythin' for us.

SN: Mmm.

NA: Y'know, and cos we were quite management we'd just do job to job to job to job. So it was quite...but there became a point where you'd 'ave y'know 10 jobs in at once, and obviously you can't work like that, you physically, y'know you've got to y'know take people on and that's what we did. We expanded and it came to a point where I 'ad quite a lot, and then now it dropped back down an I've only got 2, well 3 workin' for us really now. But I've got a myriad of people throughout the factory who've worked for us, who I know, as soon as the next big job comes in, I just I ? *muffled* say 'I'm gonna need 8 people'.

SN: Mmm.

NA: Y'know x, y, an z, an, an they come work back for us. Y'know see, they take the skills back into the factory, which does help y'know, they're makin' fittings, if they've made heritage product, they know all the standards we expect. If they go to make fittings they carry that standard across, so it helps throughout the company. Y'know those people know what we y'know sorta do, and even though I deal with the heritage section, I do look after the fittin's side as well, the standard fittin's., I cast my eye over them and say 'well I'm not 'appy with that', y'know. And Frank looks after 'em as well as part of 'is job. So 'e's y'know always constantly lookin' an...so we, we have very high standards in our standard fittin's, to go with machine made tiles, y'know.

SN: Uh huh.

NA: The fittin's we make with handmade tiles are handmade, and for the machine-made tiles they're handmade. Y'know so we, we...even though you've got 2 different standards of tiles, err to a certain extent but you've still gotta y'know make 'em to a good quality. An erm we do that so, erm... Erm, forgotten what the question was now...

SN: Do you 'ave any idea when you're next big order might be?

NA: Erm, yeah, I've err, I've actually just been on the 'phone to somebody in America this mornin', err regardin' 2 jobs, so err... one in Pennsylvania and one in Florida erm, an also one in Canada. For the same company, 'e's like a sales agent...that we've dealt wiv 'im for years, an they buy a lot of our tiles, an yeah we do a lot of erm very expensive houses over there. An they seem to be very, very buoyant, which is good for the rest of the world.

SN: Mmm.

NA: If America's doin' OK...an we've 'ad some good figures recently on their economy an employment an that, but th...y'know if they're doin' well then y'know it's, it bodes well. Err so we've got a few big jobs for y'know North America.

SN: Uh huh

NA: Which is, which is good. Err but we're also erm lookin' at y'know a job in Birmingham, well there's 4 jobs in Birmingham actually which are all gonna happen this year. But there's one that's gonna happen very imminently, an 'e's, 'e's a client we've dealt wiv the last 14, 15 years...

SN: Mmmm.

NA: Y'know 'e builds erm specific Chinese supermarkets an restaurants an erm warehouses. He sort of importants the food from China, an if you've et in a Chinese restaurant you've et food 'e's brought into the country. 'E's that, y'know 'e's that good at what 'e does, an y'know 'e's, 'e's grown from y'know a small little company to bein' y'know, y'know

quite a huge wholesaler. In this country, so...you probably never heard of 'im, probably never recognise 'im, but you'd've et 'is food, y'know so...

SN: Hahah

NA: But 'e's y'know 'e's sorta like that type a client that we've dealt with over the years, who knows what we've done originally an knows what we can do in the future for 'im, an erm... Y'know, so we built that relationship up, an that, but erm... I'm expectin' this year, it could be challengin' this year. Err I think mainly because of the money money aspect that seems to be sort of slowed down completely. Even though some a the clients we deal with who y'know might be y'know sort of affluent, who y'know lookin' at those bespoke things an, an y'know they'll still spend the money no matter what...

SN: Mmm.

NA: Err but we've seen a lot of err y'know sorta the agencies y'know English 'Eritage, National Trust of all y'know been squeezed, an an that is 'avin' a sort of an indirect affect on us, because we're seein' a lot a jobs now where, they would a reroofed it, but they're just doin' a repair, an then they, they're knowin' that it needs to be done, but they can't afford it now, so...

SN: Right.

NA: ...we'll do it in a few years. So we're expecting y'know 2, 3, 5 years those projects will need doin'.

SN: Uh huh.

NA: Which is...a lot, a lot of it is a false economy because ya still pay for your scaffold, you still pay for people to go onto your roof an fix it, an, y'know so..an obviously costs are escalating year by year, so... Come 5 years time, whatever you pay now might be 30% dearer later on, y'know with the cost a gas, an y'know an such forth y'know so... But that that's just the reality a the world at the moment, everybody 'as 'ad their budgets cut, erm an y'knowyou just have to hope that y'know it doesn't last too long.

SN: Yeah.

NA: An this austerity measures erm, erm y'know...don't go on an on an on. Y'know because it's y'know it, it, 'as affected us y'know we're, we are erm sorta quieter than we were, but we're still enough sorta work comin' in that ya think 'well it's still, y'know, it's still good enough, y'know'. It's...

SN: Would you say the balance of work's changed, so maybe you're doing more bespoke an less heritage?

NA: Erm not really, no. It's not changed erm much at all. We're still getting' the same type of enquiries, still the same type of work we need to do, but erm, we, we are sayin; that aspect where people are sayin' 'well, I'll 'ave to compromise on this'. Y'know and w...they never did before it was like 'oh well we expect this to be done' an erm we do that... We're seein' some a that from architects where they're, they're lookin' at alternatives if they can get away with it, y'know. Well it's obviously, y'know, everybody tried to push the plannin' boundaries, err to a certain extent. Y'know 'what can I get away with?'. Because they're all...everybody's lookin' for even just a small cost savin' nowadays.

SN: Mmm.

NA: Y'know so we've 'ad to expand our ranges from j, not just makin' handmade tiles and machine made tiles, we make hand crafted tiles. It's sorta like a middle ground, for certain projects where not historically in the heritage area, but in err sorta y'know general tile sales but people would like handmade tiles but they can't afford 'em.

KL: So what's hand crafted then, as opposed to handmade?

NA: The, their sorta more or less machine made, that look erm sorta like, like ya get handmade *muffled* bricks.

KL: Right. OK yeah.

NA: They look handmade but they're not. Y'know they're still machine mad...

KL: Uh huh.

NA: Erm, y'know so it gives a sort of, y'know it's a cost savin' but it, it still looks good enough that..

KL: Mmm.

NA: Err, comes...that's where the hand crafted comes in. So that's err, erm but you, you can still tell. Y'know anybody can tell it, it's a...y'know that's a hand crafted, that's a handmade. Y'know there is that difference, but if it's in an area where it's not a listed buildin', but they still want y'know...

SN: Mmm.

NA: ...they don't want a machine made look, they don't want that. They still want something that's y'know gotta a bit a character to it, then err a hand crafted tile comes in an there is an awful lot of...we seen handmade manufacturers move into hand crafted tiles over the last 5 years. Where, they're getting' impounded with regulations, y'know the health and safety where y'know we, y'know we, we suffer from 'ere. We can only make...let people work for a certain amount of time, or doin' certain tiles, or...'ave to cut tallies. Y'know to say 'well you can't make y'know x number anymore because of 'ealth and safety'. So even we've seen that y'know, b, b, but we're, we're probably bounded by different regulations that what a smaller manufacturer is. Who's only employin' 20 people. They, they can get away with certain things, health and safety wise than what we can't, y'know we, we, with the amount a accreditations you gotta have, you've got be sure that you're y'know you're workin' to a certain extent. So, there is certain jobs even on my side where y'know I'm restrictin' what somebody can make in a day. Y'know, so that does 'ave an affect. It adds...the price goin' up...

SN: Uh huh

NA: Y'know where y'know only goin' back 30 years, err somebody makin' handmade tiles woulda made 1300 a day, y'know that's 1 person woulda bashed out them tiles in a day. Where nowadays you're restricted to 500.

SN: Really?

NA: Which is a 'uge drop y'know from what is was.

KL: That sounds like an amazing lot to me.

NA: Yeah, it's...

KL: 1300 you said did you?

NA: Yeah 1300. An that's what they used to make at our yard over at Barrow. Y'know, I mean Jeff who's me senior craftsman, 'e used to do that y'know, an 'e sometimes moans 'ohhhh don't...I used to bash this 6 days a week, bm bm bm bm' y'know.

SN: Ha ha

NA: But 'e knows y'know you'd get y'know sorta problems...

KL: Mmm.

NA: y'know late on in life it does affect you, so... We 'ave to y'know, bound by regulations an we 'ave to expect that people...y'know we look after their welfare. Y'know so we've 'ad to change some practices to suit, which is, it's right y'know...nobody should be doin' a job that's gonna make you sort of err ill...

KL: Mmm.

NA: ...y'know sorta decades down the line. Y'know so there 'as been that sorta change in the industry, an, and that's obviously not gonna go away, so there will be err I'd envisage over the next 5 to 10 years a lotta manufacturers who are doin' handmade tiles, erm... still make handmade tiles, but some of 'em may, yknow, it'd be financially may not be worf it to 'em. They may fold an, y'know, so there might be that sea change in the industry where handmade tiles are gonna be rarer and rarer. Y'know, even though there's a demand for 'em, but they might be...y'know the regulations might drive them y'know not to the wall, but y'know restrict their availability, y'know within the industry. So, which will be very challengin' y'know cos a 'uge amount of tile 'ave 'andmade tiles on an do need 'em.

SN: Yeah.

NA: So, erm...

SN: OK. A couple of things. You mentioned architects...

NA: Uh huh.

SN: And, do you find that your tiles get specified by certain architects? Or does the builder or client tend to go for you...?

NA: Erm, err we deal wiv allsorts. I mean I've, I deal wiv homeonwers directly, y'know. They'll come an buy stuff off as directly, an I don't deal wiv an architect, or a merchant, builder, roofin' contractor, anythin', y'know. So, but we do 'ave erm quite a good erm relationships wiv a lot of architects, y'know, especially on the heritage side. I, I, I 'ave personal dealin's with a lot of architects y'know, meetin' them. Y'know it's not just a sales thing, I offer the advice to 'em, y'know cos they don't understand err the tiles, so they'll come to us, say 'well I'm lookin' at doin' such a thing', an 'what can you do for us?'. Y'know, so I'll give them that advice, y'know, an we do it freely, y'know, we, we...even if they don't use our tiles, we'll still help 'em out y'now cos they expect y'know those buildin's, you still want 'em to be...look right, an y'know no matter who does it, so...

SN: Mmm

NA: Yeah we help 'em out in that respect. So we do have a lot of erm personal contacts, y'know, wi, wiv architects, an same with merchants, we 'ave a go,very good relationships with y'know the network of merchants up and down the

country, whether they're the 'uge SIG branches, y'know, who are the main sorta players in the roofin' industry, they're kinda control the whole industry..y'know the Tescos of err roofin'. Side to it...y'know their here, there and everywhere. But we also deal wiv the smaller independents, so y'know call 'em smaller independents, they might 'ave 40 branches, but they're te smaller independents we deal with them, as well as 1 off roofin' merchants we deal with them. Roofin' contractors we deal direct with as well. Y'know we, we are, we don't sort of say 'oh we only deal with them', y'know we're an open sort of book in that respect, we y'know people want advice we'll give 'em advice, they wanna buy our tiles we'll give...y'know it's erm...y'know it is that sort of erm relationship we 'ave, we don't err don't sort of look down on somebody an think 'oh well they're not worth botherin' about'.

SN: Uh huh

NA: Because I know, I 'ad 1 call from erm a gentleman, erm I couldn't understand 'im very well, 'e was not very good English, erm and I was tryin' to 'ave a conversation in my car, on the 'phone, which is even more difficult err I was speakin' to 'im an 'e said 'well next time you're in London can you come and see me?' and erm 'I'd like to discuss a project'. So I asked 'im to e-mail me 'is details cos I couldn't write it down in the car, and said an then, so 'is e-mailed me 'is details an 'e was err was quite a wealthy man, y'know, was a billionaire. An 'e just literally lookin' at 'is project, an 'e was not happy with what his architect had said, an 'e, 'e wanted some advice, an unbeknown to me y'know , I'd spoke to the architect err 3 hours before on the same project, it's only when the get back in the office, look at the e-mails, I thought

'ohh, 'ave I erm put my foot in it here?'. But y'"know then, y'know I spoke to the architect, said

'listen, 'e 'as rung me' I said "e's asked about this'. Said 'I didn't know who 'e was, but I gave 'im some advice on this an...' erm, y'know so I was quite open with 'em. I could've y'know tried to squirm out of it, but I said y'know 'you know what 'e's like, you know what 'e expects an, an this is what 'e *muffled*?'. An the architect was actually quite erm happy that e'd actually told 'im. He said

'well, I know what I'm dealin' with. Now'. Y'know 'e knew what 'e could do, what 'e couldn't get away wiv himself. An 'e knew what the client expected, so it actually helped his relationship with 'is client, cos 'e, 'e'd only met 'is client twice...

SN: Right.

NA: ...an 'is client just says 'I want such a buildin'', basically brought in photographs of buildin's around the world. 'I'd like this, like that, like this'.

KL: Ha hah

NA: 'Inside's like this'. An 'e was y'know sort of y'know picture bookin' what he want, an y'know the architect was thinkin'

'well it's a bottomless pit' y'know so 'e was thinkin' 'great', y'know it's summit to stamp, but then 'e 'as to, 'e comes to us an 'e says 'well I'd like this...' I said

'Well you never, ever get them through plannin''. They wouldn't allow it in the area of Mayfair, where it was. Says 'you're not gonna get that, that done'. Y'know an I sort a told 'im, before 'e get too far down the line I says 'you're not gonna get that'. y'know I says, y'know, 'I know y'know what the area is, where you are you will not be able to put them tiles on the roof'. Y'know so it sort of saved him an awful lot of time tryin' a get details, costs and such forth. Doin' plans an that...so I said 'you will be able to do that'. In the end we ended makin' a lot of bespoke pantiles for 'im, cos the client wanted summit that nobody else's got. Y'know an it was sort of...'e said

'I like this look.' 'E says 'I want that', y'know. 'E was from Eastern Europe an 'e said 'I'd like this'.

'OK, we'll see what we can do'. So y'know we've got that, y'know if sometimes we've gotta balance the relationships we have y'kno, it's err you wonder if you're gonna upset somebody down the line, but you, y'know, I'm, I'll try an be as straight wiv everybody. Y'know sorta se a buildin' on...

'yeah you can do it, or do this, an it's gonna cost this'. Y'know it's y'know take it or leave it, y'know.

SN: Mmm.

NA: Erm....but we 'ave very good relationships. We y'know, erm, I get an awful lotta people who err just ring me up for 'ave a chat, y'know.

KL: Haha.

NA: ...it's, it's amazin' the number a people sometimes erm, y'know the number a times people say 'ahh I understand you're the person to speak to. I've been speakin' to such body, they've said can you...'. I've said

'yeah, yeah'. I give advice, I've, I've give advice to a journalist for New York. Who was writin' an article. Rung me out a know where an says

'I'd like to write...an I'm lookin' at this'. I'm like,

'ow do ya get my name?' Y'know...

SN: Hahaha.

NA: But 'e'd spoke to somebody who...'this guy I spoke to this mornin' in Ontario, and 'e said'

'oh yeah. Speak with Neville, y'know ring up...'. So 'e rung at 3 o'clock in the morning, y'know, which is not good is it?

KL: Hahaha...

NA: I 'ave me phone, I do 'ave me phone on don't I? Y'know an 'e said to me 'mind wakin' up?'. And I thought *muffled* an just said

'I'll...ca I ring you later?'. Y'know, it was 3 o'clock in the morning.

'Oh yeah...it's rather late here. Sorry'. Y'know it's just that was, y'know... So I spoke to 'im an y'know I gave 'im a bit of advice, an y'know it, you don't get anythin' from it. But it's, it, do that, y'know.

KL: Mmm.

NA: An we try an erm build those relationships up. Y'know we're quite, we do a lot of support for trainin' colleges, y'know wiv erm, y'know the training colleges up an down the country... roofin', you know we've always 'ad erm err good support for the 1 on the south coast, which is just sort of erm only opened in the last 18 months. Erm, we sent ours down there, y'know they, they ring up, say 'can 'e 'ave some?'

'Yeah'. W don't charge 'em...

SN: No.

NA: We just, we send 'em, y'know we like people to learn with the proper materials, an how to do things, y'know.

SN: Mmmm.

NA: So, so we quite often y'know help those training colleges, out, or go an support erm an event. Y'know we've often err I've taken me heritage stand erm y'know an a few bits an bobs, an gone an done an IHBC y'know day, y'know seminar day, y'know where we just 'ave things there... Y'know obviously we 'ave a sales angle to it, y'know we, we...

SN: Yeah.

NA: ...always like people to buy our stuff, otherwise we...there's no point us comin' anymore, is there? If err we don't err sell anythin'. But, err, I'm always supportive of things like that, that people try an do good for the industry, I'll try an help them out. We've done work for SPAB, we've 'ad, y'know SPAB scholars come 'ere, they see err what we can do, y'know sort of hopefully they took that knowledge away with 'em, an understand in the industry what is expected. Erm, same wiv erm y'know we do a couple of exhibitions every year, for the listed property show, and for the historic homes association. We do their AGM. We've done that for the last 12 years.

SN: Really?

NA: Y'know we're part a the furniture there, y'know we... Same people every year, we park opposite an y'know, an, an it, it is like a little...cos they are like a club, y'know, they're very...

SN: Yeah.

NA: ...erm, I mean I'm a member meself but err I'm probably not as active as I should be. Erm, y'know which I'm 'opin' to change this year, y'know it's err, an try an y'know get to a few a the meetings an...

SN: Mmmm.

NA: Cos we've 'ad a lot a the members who we meet, an they ask questions an like I mentioned about the solar, an I didn't know the question, but I *muffled* to 'elp 'em wiv, I try an direct 'em, say 'well speak to y'know you're area representative, or just ring English 'Eritage up, National Trust. Ring 'em up an ask 'em, y'know they're, they're not ogres that people a scared of that...'

SN: Did you find out the answer to that?

NA: I've erm, there's actually a seminar in erm, at Calke Abbey I think it is. Erm, in Wiltshire, somewhere like down there.

SN: Oh OK.

NA: Erm later on this year, so I'm goin' ta sorta go along to that an try an learn a bit meself, as well as y'know... Cos people are lookin' at that y'know alternative, renewable energy at the moment, an, an thankfully English 'Eritage 'ave changed their, their stance a bit. They are sort of sayin'...I think National Trust've probably done more than English 'Eritage...

SN: Yeah.

NA: They've sorta said 'well', y'know these 'uge houses, they need heat.

SN: Yeah.

NA: Y'know, an it costs an awful lot of money, but... An the upkeep doesn't get any cheaper every year, so why not in those areas where they can't see it, not gonna spoil the look, not sayin' ya go to Blenheim Palace and stick solar panels on the front, y'know but if in the internal areas where public can't see apart from unless you're in a helicopter, y'know, then why not? Why can't they do it? An thankfully there's a lot of err change in that respect, an a lot a biomass, in like y'know the ground, heat pumps, an all the things like that are getting' a bit more acceptable now, which I think they should be y'know.

SN: Mmmm.

NA: That we all 'ave to look at what we need to do, erm...

KL: Mmm.

NA: So, y'know we're, we y'know things like that we're, we're very supportive of. We, we'll...if some people come an ask us y'know 'can you do this, an...' we, we, we'll y'know, we'll 'elp 'em out an y'know, y'know try and erm y'know see, see what advice we can do. Like when we did that Richardtown show a couple a years ago at the err, wi Alan at the err at the house...

SN: Mmm.

NA: An was err a challengin' exhibition that, an y'know a house with no heatin', no lightin' an... Was nothin', it was like...we were y'know what do we do? But just went there an y'know Frank sculpted a few things, an y'know tryin' ta y'know support the local err sorta people, as well as y'know nationally as well.

SN: Mmm.

NA: Y'know.

SN: An then, you said about working in America and stuff, an so I just wondered how far and wide your products actually travel?

NA: Well erm, we, we've always erm...we used to not really do a lot abroad, we never really bothered. Because it was too much hassle really, y'know. Erm, but we...over the last sort of 10 years we, we've done an awful lot more, erm, cos our products are quite desirable in America, y'know they, they do like the handmade tiles, cos they can't get them over there...

SN: Mmm.

NA: Y'know they get the machine made y'know, they can...but they do like to import 'em, especially as y'know high-end, premium buildin's, they want somethin' distinctive, they want something not bothered about payin' for...not sayin' that our tiles are expensive, but to import 'em it probably doubles the cost, to ship 'em across to America, cos you need special pallets for 'em to go on, they have to be heat treated.

KL: Oh.

NA: So...because they wouldn't allow 'em into, into the US because erm y'know of infestation.

KL: Mmm.

NA: Y'know with the forests and that, they do, they're quite stringent on what they'll allow, wood to import. So, erm, it is quite difficult. So we, we've done qui...an awful growin' work in North America, erm, not just erm sorta Canada, an sorta now New York states, movin' across to Cana...err ah to California as well...

SN: Right.

NA: Like we're doin' this project in Florida, erm, we, we've done tiles that are actually in erm, in Disney Land in Tokyo, erm...

SN: Really?

NA: Yeah.

KL: Tokyo?

NA: In Tokyo, yeah. We, we've done tiles across there. We, we did tiles for err erm it's going back an awful long while now, but we did tiles for Iraq. Erm, but no longer there. Obviously the building got erm....

SN: Mmm.

NA: ...demolished. Erm, it was for erm a certain ruler...

SN: Right.

NA: ...that they had over there. So we'd rather not y'know talk about that...

SN: Associate yourselves?

NA: ...to much. Yeah. But we did, we made some special tiles for, for a buildin' over there. Erm, when I first started, an it was like y'know obviously it was never an issue then as what it would be nowadays, y'know.... But, but we're seein', we're seein; some err a lot a work from the Middle East as well, where they're lookin' at... Y'know where they 'ave a lot a flat roofs...

SN: Mmm.

NA: Y'know a lot a their buildin's are flat roofs. There's, there's no need to 'ave a pitch roof cos you don't 'ave rain.

SN: No.

NA: Y'know, but they're, they're sort of lookin', because they're becomin' a bit more westernized, so they're seein' y'know they come over here on holiday or to live, an then, then they take y'know, what they see...

KL: Mmm.

NA: They wanna take it back, y'know. So we're seein' that sort of erm y'know, they like that sort of westernized sort a look, so we're seein' that sometimes they might want a buildin' with a pitched roof. Absolutely no need for it, but they like distinctive look.

KL: Mmm.

NA: Obviously y'know they've got plenty a money. A lot of, some a the clients we deal with, so they're lookin' at that. But we've, we've started doin' work in France an Germany, which we never did. Which is quite erm unusual because they're y'know huge manufacturers of clay tiles, y'know go anywhere in France, Germany, Spain...

KL:Mmm.

NA: Y'know an all the tiles, roofs are clay. It's probably the absolute opposite a this country, where probably about 15% is clay. Over there it's probably nearer 5% isn't clay. Y'know, might do a bit a concrete, an a bit a slate, an stone. But it's y'know it's completely opposite, where we y'know, we can do tiles that they don't do over there, an they will y'know sorta like 'em. We've always 'ad competition from importers, over here, y'know, the mass manufacturers, but we're actually part a the same group now, so it's...

SN: Yeah.

KL: Oh right, oh.

NA: ...it's less so, y'know we, cos, y'know our group who we're part of are y'know 'uge manufacterers of bricks and tiles, y'know. We're the number 1 clay tile manufacturer in the world I think, I think the number 2 in bricks. So, it might be the other way 'round, but, y'know, it's...we're, we're part of a 'uge group now. An even though we're part of them, we're sort of y'know the, they have seen the benefits of what we do, an what we do specifically in this country. Y'know they see that it's not the same as on the continent. Y'know where they 'ave different plannin' regulations, they can put machine made tiles on a 14th century chateau in France, and nobody's bat an eyelid as long as it looks OK. In this country, you could not even envisage to try an get y'know machine made tiles onto a grade 1 buildin'. It just wouldn't happen. Y'know, cos it'd get thrown out straightaway, an they'd laugh at ya, an y'know there'd be a 'uge court case, people told to take 'em off an y'know replace 'em an things like that. So we're seein' erm, we're seein' a market for our products over there because a the network we have now. Y'know they're learnin' off us, and we're learnin' off them, an, an y'know we're seein' erm some quite good contacts that we're gettin', and we're spreadin' our name furether away now, we've had an enquiry last year from St Petersburg. Y'know which is 'uge sorta growth in regeneration. Err somebody lookin' at err our tiles over there.

SN: Right.

NA: Erm, an we always used to y'know say 'we don't know if they'll last in the weather, but...'. We seem to be getting' the Siberian weather here don't we...

KL: Ha haha

SN: Yeah.

NA: So we, I don't think we need to worry about that. But we erm, I mean we send tiles to Australia. I've 'ad enq, a couple of enquiries for some earthquake damaged buildings in New Zealand.

KL: Oh OK.

NA: Which we're lookin' at restorin' over the next couple a years. Cos they've got an awful lot of work, especially in Christchurch, it's y'know it was heavily hit, y'know...

SN: Yeah.

NA: Y'know there's a couple a buildings there that y'know've got slates on but they, they've lost all the ridges, y'know the ridges have had to be thrown away.

SN: Uh huh.

NA: So y'know we're lookin' at replacement ridges for 'em. Y'know so they're gonna 'ave y'know 6, 7,000 mile journey just to replace the roof. But they, they can't get 'em over there or, good enough, or anybody close by wouldn't be able to do it, so... Erm, but erm we're lookin' at China as well, which is, y'know'd be good to send somefin to China, in exchange for everythin' they send to us...

KL: Ha haha

NA: So er but we've seen err a bit of y'know inklings of growth there, that people y'know they like the western style.

SN: Uh huh

NA: Which is really strange because we're doin' a couple a Chinese buildin's at the moment y'know...

SN: That's true actually...

NA: ...which, y'know we're mimickin' what they're doin'.

SN: Yeah.

KL: Mmmm.

NA: Yeah, they like what we do, so it's err y'know we're y'know it's y'know we, we'll do work wherever, it's not erm a problem an that, it's err the challenge is getting' things there.

KL: Mmmm.

NA: Yeah.

SN: Yeah.

NA: D'you know it's (*the snow*) comin' a bit...heavier in it?

SN: I know.

NA: You should be alright, it's not stickin' that much.

SN: Isn't it?

NA: Yeah.

SN: Do you 'ave any other questions Kim?

KL: I think we've covered most...

SN: I think so yeah.

KL: Yeah, yeah. I think that's probably it.

SN: OK great.

NA: That's alright. Well not that's great...

SN: Thank you very much.

KL: ...interesting...

NA: ...I mean I'm seein'...I think the industry as a whole, we've seen an awful lot of erm, erm sorta good comin' out a the last probably 8 years

SN: Uh huh

NA: Where we're seein' a lot more like sort of, like the work you're involved with, like people like that, we're seein' a lot more erm agencies y'know I know everybody's 'avin' their fundin' cut...

SN: Mmm.

NA: Y'know but we're seeing a lot of erm err groups bein' set up around the country where their lookin' at trainin', an y'know reenacting skills.

SN: Yeah.

NA: Which never 'appened before. So hopefully that's gonna be...that's gonna be good. Y'know that the people out, the government specially is gonna y'know recognise that an say that y'know 'oh yeah we need to retain these skills, we need to keep this...'. Especially in rural areas where a lot a these skills, not just roofin' we're talkin' about 'ere, but y'know it's the general y'know buildin' work that gets done, y'know somebody's a pargetter, it's quite a rare thing nowadays, but...

SN: No you don't find many pargetters do you?

NA: ...but, y'know with the advent of lime growin', y'know people a gettin' more appreciative. It's things like that might erm, they might be a growth in it, but you need people to do it.

SN: Mmm.

NA: You need people to teach people to do it.

SN: Yeah.

KL: Mmmm.

NA: That's the challenge y'know, we're, y'know we're...I deal wiv quite a few good roofers, but if, y'know in a generation's time, will they pass their knowledge onto the newer generation, y'know? We've seen a lot a change in the industry where they've moved away from mortar roofs, to dry fixed roofs, so y'know...I can't envisage that's gonna move over to the listed side. I can't see it for plannin', never gonna happen, so... it's gonna, the general roofin's gonna change, so you might lose some skill there...

SN: Mmm.

NA: Because of what's happenin', so it's always, y'know, it's maybe the heritage sort of sector will be the, y'know the key of retaining skills, not just the general roofing side, the heritage side is where we y'know, where we could see a lot a people learn those skills and pass it on.

SN: Yeah...

NA: Otherwise it could easily get lost, y'know we, we've 'ad a instant in the factory where we've 'ad 1guy who used to make these pantiles' y'know you've seen the handmade pantiles bein' made...

SN: Mmmm

NA: ...on the rather weird machine...

SN: What's it called, the machine?

NA: The machine...it's just an extruder, it's just y'know a handmade tile extruder...

SN: OK.

NA: It's just...it's very simple but it's like a Heath Robinson machine...

SN: Yeah ha ha...

NA:it's, there's worta widgets here, there, and scrapers and sliders...

SN: ...like a torture instrument...

NA: ...you gotta wire it off, an you gotta get a rhythm when you do it. But 'e, 'e'd actually, 'e wanted to back an work out on the yard...

SN: Oh really?

NA: Yeah, an so 'e's, y'know you can't stop somebody if there's a position available, so 'e wanted to go out on a forklift an work out on the yard.

SN: Why did 'e...was 'e just bored...?

NA: 'E's getting' on a bit...

SN: Oh

NA: ...so 'e sort of thought 'well, a bit of an easier life, drivin' a forklift'.

SN: Mmmm.

NA: Than doin' this, so it's fair enough, but, we've 'ad to train 4 people up to learn that. Even though there's only 1 person doin' it.

SN: Mmm.

NA: You need those other people do it in case 1 person's off. Y'know on holiday, somebody else has to do it, so they've all learned it and they've all like got y'know...and we've found 1 lad whose doin' it really well, an 'e's picked it up well, so you think 'well y'know 'e'd've never've done that before, because somebody else's moved on, there's an opportunity there'. An, so w'eve learnt, they've learnt new skills, y'know so, which y'know is good for them. Y'know it obviously 'elps them because they're more versatile...

SN: Mmmm.

NA: ...so they're more valuable to the company.

SN: Uh huh

KL: Mmm.

NA: So y'know they retain that skill, they feel a bit more sort of better. They're not just a 1 trick pony, they're not just doin' 1 job day in day out. An that's what we try an do, we try an switch people about an give 'em a bit of a change, y'know we, we 'ad 1 guy in there whose 18 years been makin' bonnets, that's all 'e's made. And we keep sayin' to 'im 'when do you wanna learn this?'. An 'e's a really good bonnet maker, y'know 'e's the best at what 'e does...

SN: Probably the best bonnet maker in the world!

NA: ...'e is, 'e can do it in, 'e could do it wiv 'is eyes shut, y'know 'e's, 'e's that good at it, but we're sayin' to 'im "ave a bit a variety, you need to do this, just try that'. An 'e was like

'I don't wanna make ridges, that's boring'. Y'know, I said well

'I know' but y'know, 'you never know if ya' y'know 'we might not make bonnets for a month, what ya gonna do?'. 'E said

'Oh, well, ahh. We never...'. Y'know it's never gonna come to that, we always make bonnets, y'know 'e's tryin' ta...we try an encourage people, say

'try summit different. Y'know you might, y'know learn somein else'. And that's what we do wiv y'know err the people we 'ave, we try an sorta say

'well if you could do it, 'ave a go'.

SN: Mmmm

NA: 'Don't be scared, y'know'. We 'ave 'ad training days where we've got people an said y'know, 'right basically, that's a finial, an get on an do it'. Y'know, an you see if they can pick it up and figure out what to do. Y'know you still give someone a bit of an idea, 'you need to fix this 'ere, attach that there, work this clay in there', y'know... make sure *muffled* an just leave 'em to do it, an y'know an you learn like that, to see if somebody's picked it up, or...

SN: Yeah.

NA: Somebody'll just turn 'round an say 'can't do this'. An y'know they're quite honest an say 'well that's not for me that'. They're a bit scared y'know doin' it. But shouldn't be cos, y'know if you don't try it, you don't, you don't know. Erm, so we, we y'know we done things like that, in the past, but... Erm, y'know, we 'ave good staff, I must admit, we 'ave good workers, an y'know we y'know we're quite y'know sorta happy with wi err y'know we can do...somebody comes to us and says

'can you do this?', y'know we very rarely turn around an say no, y'know sometimes I create a rod for my own back because y'know I take on more and more difficult jobs every time, but... Y'know when I go in there and say

'we're gonna be doin' this', and they're all goin'

'ahhh, no. Why can't we do summit simple?'. But then again, when they start doin' in they say

'oh, I quite like doin' this'. Y'know they get, they appreciate what they're doin' cos they see y'know some a the buildin's that we've done, and y'know we've done some famous buildin's, an y'know they're over in London or wherever, an they're on 'oliday an they go

'ahh I went...'. The lad who we took on who was the, who was the temp, 'e took 'is son to see a job that 'e did...

SN: Oh really?

NA: 'E did yeah, an 'is son was like 'alright, OK'. Y'know, not re...in the slightest bit interested, but 'e said I did them, I did them. So 'is son said which ones specifically did you do? Y'know, an there's thousands up there...

KL: Ha ha ha

NA: ...an 'e's like 'ahh well I did these, up 'ere', even though there's like y'know... 'e's, but 'e's like, 'e's got that passion in 'im now. Y'know, 'e actually bothered, an 'e said 'e's terrible now, cos 'e does drive along lookin' at roofs.

KL: Haha.

NA: I said 'that's it, you've got the sickness'.

KL: Ha ha.

NA: That's it, you've done...t cos that's what happens, so... 'opefully y'know we get that into people...

SN: Do you stamp your tiles? Do you like make it known..?

NA: We, we do, we don't do it enough though, erm I mean we sort of erm...sometimes if you stamp them you can slightly deform them...

SN: Right.

NA: But we do do it, y'know we do stamp certain things. We stamp 'em up y'know...erm a lot a the jobs that we do, I know they're our tiles y'know..

SN: Yeah, you do, but I'm thinking like for...

NA: In generations y'know because erm y'know we do keep a database an we, y'know that database will always be active, so if somebody in 50 years time turned round and says 'I've got such a building, did you do these?'. An, y'know, they'll be a database that people can turn 'round an say

'Oh yeah, we made them 2008'.

SN: Mmmm

NA: Y'know an they say y'know...we keep that as erm a matter of fact for our quality standards, y'know the accreditations that we do, that we, we sorta say 'yep, we've done that for..', y'know, if that goes wrong, y'know they fail or summit, then we know we have to replace 'em.

SN: Yeah.

NA: But we...basically it's y'know I keep a record'll say y'know yeah we know what this... if I get a call that says 'oh, you might not remember but back in 2002 I did such a thing...', an I just check my database, an

'Yes, we did that in High Wycombe'.

'Oh yeah, how did you know that?!' Y'know.

SN/KL: Haha

NA: I said 'well, cos you're on the database an...'. So it's, we do try and do that, but we don't stamp enough y'know. I mean erm sometimes they're that busy workin' that they forget to y'know, stamp. But we 'ave done some jobs where we've done...we don't do every tile, cos there's literally no need...

SN: Yeah that's silly...

NA: ...it just, it's an operation you don't need to do. So we might do 1 in, 1 in every 10. Y'know but...

SN: Mmm.

NA: ...they're that much at work, an then they go 'oh, I forgot to do that...'.
SN: Mmm.

SN: Mmm.

NA: An then try an do 'em afterwards, but I said 'now you start deformin' things'. Just leave it an that, y'know.

SN: OK.

NA: But, but it is summit that we...I mean all our, all our pantiles are marked up, y'know we, because there is only 1 other pan tile manufacturer around, but erm, we know what they do, an what we do, an we 'ave to make sure that ours erm y'know aren't theirs, y'know for quality purposes. But y'know we erm do that, but our plain tiles are all stamped up y'know that we do. But on the heritage side y'know we, we don't stamp enough. We don't, we don't erm say y'know 'that's us', but we know, if you know what I mean, but like you say in 50 years time, what do we...other people...?

SN: Yeah.

NA: But erm, that's a point...I'll 'ave to...get that done...

SN: OK. Well I think that's everything I wanted to ask.

KL: Mmmm mm

SN: OK

NA: That's alright.

SN: Thank you very much indeed.

NA: That's alright, no problem, that's been great, y'know.

Stanley Gardale, Firm14PD. February 13th 2012

SG:sort out my CSCS heritage card.

SN: It would've been. Have you done it?

SG: I did. And my friend err Harriet Grange, up in Scotland, has got very upset cos she didn't sort it out in time, and then...now it's very difficult to get hold of one.

SN: Yeah, no since....after September 2010 it was.

SG: And erm, she said there was a company in Preston, or somebody in Preston who can provide you with a qualification at a vast price, said about £5,000.

SN: Ahhh! No that's too much. There's a company in erm in Bedale that can do it for more like 1,000, or I, less if you let them know in advance and they might be able to find funding.

SG: Because she's, she's erm a very effective grainer and marbler and erm... She teaches an awful lot, she's quite well known.

SN: Oh really? OK.

SG: She goes over to the states and teaches. She stopped...she used to teach in the colleges in Scotland

SN: Uh huh

SG: But since they've asked, now said everybody's got to have a teaching qualification...

SN: Yeah. Same as here.

SG: There's no point. Because it...y'know she's...it's only a part time activity.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: It wasn't paying that well either.

SN: No.

SG: So she runs private courses up there.

SN: Right OK. Harriet Grange.

SG: Yes, erm, Rose Arnold is her working name, and erm...I've forgotten what she calls herself, all kinds of funny names on... She's very active on the internet...

SN: Haha, oh OK.

SG: Very active. She's err erm, full of energy and drive and fun, and she's, and she tweets

SN: OK.

SG: And has a website, and blogs and does everything like that.

SN: OK.

SG: And has got incredibly strong connections with the states....

SN: Right OK

SG: ...through doing all of that. And she goes over there and does month long courses and things.

SN: Oh really?

SG: Yeah.

SN: OK. Well I'll maybe get in touch with...

SG: And we're just about to kind of...I've actually bought the domain name for, for setting up an association of, of erm, what we calling ourselves? Erm, decorative finishers.

SN: Right, OK

SG: Which is encoura...encompass anybody who does kind of fancy effects on walls basically.

SN: Not furniture?

SG: Erm, well, well yes furniture as well, but...

SN: OK.

SG: ...but it's, it's to get away from...it's, it's, it's....that is to put together professionals rather than DIY or hobby people.

SN: Uh huh

SG: Because they are actually a kind of *muffled* associations to do with hobbyists and...

SN: Oh OK.

SG: And it's to get away from the kind of arty thing, to professional trades people.

SN: Right OK

SG: And we've just invented the name, and she's got a number of people that she's talked to that want to join in.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: Because there does need to be a new body for us...nobody represents us.

SN: Not 1 single body is there?

SG: Not 1. Erm, and I mean you got something like these heritage qualifications and things. It's absurd that we can't actually as a bunch of tradesmen represent ourselves and say 'well actually this isn't reasonable, and you've gotta have a more equitable way in...'. And these people in Bedale, well we'd put them on the website when I build it...

SN: Mmmm

SG: Which I'm gonna start doing quite soon, erm and all the suppliers and everybody.

SN: Yeah.

SG: Cos the suppliers definitely want to be in on it.

SN: Yeah, that's true. They would do wouldn't they?

SG: Erm, and so it seems worth doing. Cos no...I mean I, I've looked on the internet for training...

SN: No there isn't much in painting....

SG: There's nothing official.

SN: No nothing.

SG: And what they teach...what's it? Part 3 of the, of the erm...college courses for decorators?

SN: Yeah the NVQ. Mmmm.

SG: It's fairly minimal, and they don't seem to really know what they're doing anyway any more.

SN: I'll send you the erm, I'll send you the details of the heritage skills NVQ for P&D

SG: Mmm.

SN: Cos there are a couple a couple of units about marbling and graining...

SG: Is there?

SN: Yeah. But it's quite specialist, so I'll send that to you.

SG: That'll be....what demand is there for it? Because...

SN: Not very high demand.

SG: Because...

SN: No. I think it's probably the one that's delivered to the least people of all really.

SG: Well that's it...I was wondering...I mean we're talking about this and whatever, but actually is there a demand out there to train people up. Or have we got to the level of demand where it's people like me who are kind of self-taught to a certain extent, and just have lots of books?

SN: I think that...yeah...well we wanna get to that, I want to get to that. I want to ask you about you, and yourself...

SG: Well do you want to...? Sorry, I've started of this thing. You're the 1 who's meant to be asking me questions.

SN: Hahaha

KL: Hahaha. It's all really...we're being very relaxed about it.

SN: Yeah. We've just been kind of having chats with people. Erm, so I'll start off by introducing it. It's the 13th of February, Sophie Norton, Kim Loader and Stanley Gardale. Erm, I am interested in the relationship between conservation and craftsmanship...

SG: Uh huh.

SN: And I've kind of started off at this trying to find out a bit more about how erm conservation projects and tendering from the public sector particularly, erm affect craftsmen and the kind of practice of craft in Yorkshire. And I'm working together with Kim who's very interested in the sort of small, medium sized enterprises, and erm the public sector and sort of the wider supply chain.

SG: Uh huh

SN: So we're kind of chatting to people about erm , their skills, how they acquired their skills...

SG: Uh huh

SN: ...erm, how they find it using their skills in a kind of erm competitive market place. Erm, an things like how far you travel for the work, an also things like kind why, why you choose to be a craftsperson, maybe why it's motivating and why it excites you.

SG: Uh huh

SN: So that's kind of what we've been chatting to people about, isn't it?

KL: Uh huh.

SN: And so, the first thing we've started off by asking is erm how you did acquire your skills, and about your sort of professional life in general.

SG: Erm, I've always made things as a child.

SN: Uh huh

SG: Any kind of happiness and satisfaction I got was from making things, and I was err good at maths and physics as well, at school, and I tried physics at university. And I dropped out. Didn't like the maths, an wasn't that focused at the time. Went to art school, did 4 years at art school. Studied painting. Ended up doing sculptural objects, and I learnt how to gild, water gild, in evening class. I had 6 classes, 2nd half of an adult education course. And erm that just taught me the very basics, of how gilding, water gilding worked. And erm, when I left art school I tried to be a sculptor and it didn't really work out, and I had to start earning some money, and I got completely distracted by erm getting into the business of finishing, and then designing as well, modern furniture for the interior design market.

SN: OK.

SG: And the type a gilding I was doing was very specific for modern furniture. It was big flat areas of water gilding, which I made my speciality. And erm, that was in the '80s, erm, and up to '87 I was flat out, I was famous, I was in all the magazines, *The World of Interiors* did an article on me and I was the flavour of the month, and in '87 there was a crash, a stock market crash and my market disappeared overnight. Just bang. Within 1 month just stopped. And it was a real shock, I had 3 people working for me, I was going places and this was it, my career. And I had to say to the 3 girls that worked for me that 'I'm sorry, I 'ave no work. Nothing coming in. No sign of anything coming in. The fashion or what I produce has just ended. It was too over the top'. I mean...a coffee table started at £4,000. Which in the '80s was an enormous sum of money. But erm, and so, and err the market for that kind of expense of furniture was a small market. A very small market, even in London. London didn't have the vast concentration of wealth it now has. It was a much smaller market at the wealthy end. Erm, and it was international, I was selling to Greeks, all kind of...Americans, and Norwegians, and heaven knows what. But all based in London. But, it just ended. And then I thought 'what I'll do is set up a, a..'. I'd done odd bits of broken colour painting, and granite ragging and dragging and stuff...

SN: Mmm

SG: And there was a good market for that still, so I got into that very rapidly overnight. And then the marbling and the graining, I'd done a marbling and graining course, again 6 months. I'd had a motorcycle accident and I only did the first 6 months of the course. At a building college in South London.

SN: Right. Not the Building Crafts College?

SG: No, it was erm, it was very deepest South London. It was....down near, was it Bromley? Erm, something Bridge School.

SN: Right.

SG: A very ordinary college, which did building trades. And had a, a, a decorating section to it. Erm, os it was a very, basic straightforward bit of training that I got there, from that. And using that gave me access to all the broken colour work, and all a that kinda work, and then marbling. Erm, and then I got into doing murals, because that fashion got going. And while that was going is when I moved up to Yorkshire. And then I had a connection with Scampston – over at Richardtown – house. And they were just taking over from them...Sir Charles's mother dies, and he was taking it

on. They were redoing it from end to end and it hadn't been decorated in 90 years. And it was a 1860s scheme that they were going back to, which I.... I went in to do the marbling and graining and ended up running the whole job.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And we did the house from end to end, inside and out. And that was my main area of conservation, cos she'd worked for the National Trust, and was interested in the, y'know, getting it right. And erm, that's where my collection of books on techniques and things came out. Erm, and I cleaned up some marbling and did some stuff like that, restoration work. And so I've been doing a bit a that...that's been going on now, in amongst the other work, but I'm (*sighs*), I'm kind of...that's 1 of my portraits up there on the mantle piece, right hand side. I do portraits as well. So I cover a massive area of craftsmanship and art.

SN: Mmm.

SG: I do the figurative side, through water gilding I restored erm antique gilded furniture, and, I've done, anything with a brush I've basically done.

SN: Right OK.

SG: At 1 time or another, and so I don't really fit into any little niche particularly.

SN: No, not at all.

SG: I'm a bit of an oddity. And that's why I find employing anybody now nigh on impossible, because I'm jumping from 1 style of job to another, and 1 craft to another.

SN: Right. Erm, when you said about the training, the, the course at the building college.

SG: Uh huh

SN: And the evening class in gilding, were they accredited, or were they non-accredited.

SG: They were non-accredited. Well I wasn't bothered about being accredited because I've, I've basically worked for somebody for 3 weeks when I left art school, and didn't....hated it and left straightaway. And I've never worked for anybody else, nobody's ever trained me .

SN: Right.

SG: And the approach I take, apart from those 2 6...no they were kind of half an academic year of evening classes once a week...

SN: Uh huh.

SG: ...so you're talking about, I don't know, 6 sessions of an hour and a half. Which is, it's about as minimal as it gets.

SN: Yeah.

SG: Ummm. But having studied a bit a science and stuff, I'm quite good at looking at recipes and working out why they work and what's... So they....a lot a people, when they do basic graining, would've just got a pot of ready stained scumble glaze, added some white spirit to it and used that. Well I actually make up my own mediums. I buy the linseed oil, and the scumble glaze and everything else, and I worked out how to do that from reading books. Nobody's ever shown me. So I'm basically self-taught in everything I do.

SN: OK.

SG: Erm, and I never worked with any other grainers and marblers. At all...close to. And I was quite surprised that I got involved with the erm, the Association of Painting Craft Teachers.

SN: Yes

SG: And they've actually used me as a judge now twice.

SN: Oh really

SG: Yes, at their annual get-togethers that they've been organizing.

SN: Right OK.

SG: They've asked me this year but I got very fed up with the Scottish bunch cos they're making a kind of college only affair and trying to exclude other people.

SN: OK.

SG: And that really annoys me because I've come up from the other side. And I think the other people are what make it interesting.

SN: Mmmm

SG: Err, and I'm not over impressed by the way that the colleges teach it. You need...to teach marbling without a having a piece of the actual marble in front of you, is ludicrous. I mean the whole point about the tradition that we're in is that it imitates the actual marble.

KL: Mmm

SG: So my idea of teaching it would be to have an actual piece of the marble, and then the stages you go through, examples of the different stages, and then you can...the students can really understand what they're trying to do.

SN: Mmm

KL: So what do they work to then?

SG: You have a demonstration from somebody, and then you copy the demonstration.

SN: Mmm

SG: And that's it.

SN: And do all colleges teach it, or is it a bit ad hoc? Do you think?

SG: I think it's completely ad hoc. Erm, what impresses....I think what impressed the Association about using me as a judge was that I've actually done it

SN: Mmmm

SG: And I've got photographs of my work. And I've done it on a big scale, and a small scale, to a reasonably high standard, and there aren't that many people around who've done as much work as I have. Erm...but we all...I mean I'm not that aware of all the other people. Every now and then you bump into somebody, or you find somebody on the internet.

SN: Mmm

SG: And you think 'ooh that work looks OK'. But until you've actually seen the work, photographs are awfully deceiving.

KL: Yeah.

SG: Erm, and, the other thing about doing it all is that, erm, is that because you're not getting continuous work as a grainer or marbler or that, and you're doing this, a bit a decorating, a bit of gilding, whatever, you never get completely up to speed with it. Because unless you're doing mahogany graining or oak graining a lot, y'know over the years, you don't get that kind of.... If you look at the Victorian and the Edwardian grainers and marblers, there's a fluency about their work, and a relaxed approach about it, because they're doing so much of it they just do it, and you can just see it, just look at the marks they make. Half the time they look as if they've had 2 or 3 pints of beer before they started work.

SN: Haha

SG: Yeah? Do you see what I mean? It's, it's...they know they can do it. There's nothing up tight about it. They're not...y'know they're just relaxed, they just knock it out. And they can do it to a very high standard, and...one of the ways you can see that is that if you go up close, it just looks almost random, the marks they've made, but if you back away and see it from the right distance...

SN: Mmm.

SG: ...it kinda, kinda forms a really good representation of the marble or the wood. Erm...

SN: But you need to k...you need to keep doing it to...

SG: Yah. I basically relearn on every job I do.

SN: And how often do you work in kinda marbling and graining? Is it...

SG: I don't know really. It's erm, probably once or twice a year.

SN: Right.

SG: But it might be a big job. I mean....wh....ah oh... when I did the Millenium Centre that marbling job was, erm, 4 months working on a very big scale, 10 metre columns.

SN: Mmm.

SG: It was quite intense. 4 months intense work doing it. Erm...

KL: How did you find doing that work? I mean did it get erm, tedious? Or, y'know...

SG: No. Marbling is...

KL: Less satisfying than *muffled*

SG: ...there's a difference between graining and marbling. Graining has repeat patterns in it. Wood tends to repeat itself and you can kind of do it to a system. Every piece of marble looks different, and the moment you relax and start just knocking it out, you start producing patterns.

KL: Oh right.

SG: And the human eye just picks them out straightaway. And the moment somebody's done that kinda marbling, you can see it a mile away. Just repeat pattern...just see it, that's not marble. And so when you're doing marbling, you have to remain creative, and concentrating through the whole process. You can't relax.

KL: Right. Mmm.

SG: You've gotta control yourself and what you're doing. Erm, which means that it's actually quite a creative process, and it's...it can be stressful if you're pushing yourself to a high standard, because there's no rule about how you do it. There's no 'this is the way you do it, this is the brush you use, that's the colour that you use'. Doesn't exist. And now got the added fun and games of actually having to work in acrylics, cos they won't allow any solvents on big building sites.

SN: Really

SG: Ya. S you're working on a 10 metre column, in acrylics, which dry relatively fast, and you're working to price, cos it's a professional job and everything's done to a price, quote. And so you just knock it out, and you have to be that good at doing it that you can do it.... And I was working with an Italian who was self-taught, incredibly arrogant and macho about it all, and he was crap.

SN: Really?

SG: Ya. He didn't understand the basic concepts of marbling, and he, he kind of said 'you keep on changing what you're doing', cos I was meant to be teaching him. I said

'Yes, cos no piece of marble is the same'. And he, if you look at Spanish and Portuguese and some Italian marbling, what they actually do is produce an abstract pattern which represents marble, but is not an actual faux marble as such. And there's a strong tradition of that, and that's what he ended up doing.

SN: OK.

SG: And my fight with him was trying to get him to learn. But he thought he was as good as me, he couldn't accept the fact that I had erm about 25 years more experience than he had.

SN: Mmm

And that was a very difficult struggle. I gave up in the end. Because I was having problems with a woman up the road, at that time. That was when that was blowing up, and I didn't have the emotional strength to deal with it, and manipulate him was what I needed to do to get 'im to understand, and flatter him, and y'know play games. And I just, I was happy to teach but I wasn't happy to play games any more. I just wanted to get on with the job.

SN: Yeah.

SG: So the whole thi....I don't know, it's err...be interesting to hear what you say about all of this, because it's my...I have a very particular experience of it.

SN: Mmm. Yeah, I can imagine.

SG: Mmm. And the other thing is, I'm working...some of the time I'm doing erm, working on traditional buildings, which want a completely traditional approach. But a good other half of the time I'm working on, on modern houses.

SN: Right OK.

SG: Which is another completely different field, and take, you have to have a different approach, because they don't care about whether it's right traditionally or whether... They don't even know about wood. You talk about oak graining erm, do you know what I mean by quarter-sawn oak?

SN: No. Oh quarter-sawn...?

SG: It's a particular cut of oak you use cos it's very stable, but it's more wasteful of the tree trunk when you're cutting it up.

SN: Oh yeah, and you got a lot of the heart.

SG: And you get the heart, and you get a lot a wipe out, what are called...kind of funny, little squiggly marks. And if you look at kinda quality doors

SN: Mmmm

SG: The main frame of the door is always made with those big, those quarter saw oaks, cos it's much more stable.

SN: Really?

SG: And when I was working at Sir Charles, he was having an oak floor laid.

SN: Mmm

SG: And he was complaining they were putting the quarter sawn pieces where the, where they'd be seen. He said 'I don't like that. I want it to look like real oak'. And he had the quarter-sawn bits put underneath where the cabinets were going. And when I was regraining the shutters in the library, I was putting back exactly what was there. Luckily I'd taken photographs, cos he said 'that doesn't look like oak'. I said

'Yes, that's a quarter-sawn panel, and here's a photograph of what was there'.

SN: Mmm

KL: Mmm

SG: It'd been completely denatured, bleached out by the sun. So it had to be redone, that bit of it, completely. So it's err, it's you're kind of having arguments with people at all kinds of different levels, where you're trying to keep them happy.

SN: Mmmm. So did he go with the quarter-sawn in the end?

SG: Oh he did, because I, y'know... Well I had his wife, Lady Charles was erm wanting it right, and she was more knowledgeable than he was about it all.

SN: Right

SG: And she had a lot a faith in me. She was a very nice client to work with, cos she wanted it done properly. And then you come to y'know, like decorating that house, they, there were rooms that were in good, reasonably good condition that could be restored...the main drawing room had lovely 1860s wallpaper, metallic wallpaper, that they cleaned. And then we just repainted the skirting boards very...and the architraves and things 'round it, very carefully. But a lot of it was too far gone and had to be redone, so we were saving samples of the wallpapers, and she was having some of them reproduced, and things like that.

KL: Mmm.

SG: Erm, but where it was completely redecorated we would actually burn off all the woodwork, properly, and do a proper traditional decorating job.

SN: Right.

SG: And the sharpness, the crispness and everything was wonderful. And it's how it should be done, but nobody pays for that because it more than doubles the price of a job to burn off. Literally does. And err people won't pay for it.

SN: And when you burn off, are you getting rid of all the paint, right back to the wood?

SG: Right back to the wood.

SN: And you can't get to that with like sandpapering?

SG: Well it depends how many years you've got to spend on it!

SN: True.

SG: Haha. No not effectively no. You can strip it.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, that has its own issues with terms of damaging the wood.

SN: Mmm.

SG: But actually burning off is a traditional technique. It was done by erm properly trained, experienced decorators.

They will not leave scorch marks and damage the wood at all. They'll clean it off perfectly and it'll look like a new piece of wood.

SN: And so did you do the burning yourself?

SG: No, I have 2 guys in Leeds who are traditional decorators.

SN: OK.

SG: And they've worked on a number of houses, old houses. They've been working at Wentworth Woodhouse?

SN: Right.

SG: Do you know Wentworth Woodhouse?

SN: Err, I've heard of it but I don't know it.

SG: It's the largest private house in Western Europe.

SN: Oh really, gosh.

SG: Just north of Sheffield.

SN: Right OK.

SG: Prince Charles was there 2 weeks ago.

SN: OK.

SG: Seeing it. Cos they want to actually turn a bit of it into a hotel now, and the other half into a museum.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: It's owned by a family from London. Absolutely lunatic bunch taking that on!

KL: Haha.

SN: Did they buy it, they didn't inherit....

SG: It's got 360...say it's 365 rooms, I think it's 363 rooms or something.

SN: Uh huh

SG: 5 miles of corridors, and 1000 windows.

SN: Gosh

SG: It was on telev...there was a programme on television about it

SN: OK

SG: Its political history. There was a programme about 10 country houses...

SN: Uh huh

SG: ...different types. That was 1 of them.

KL: Mmm. Didn't see that.

SN: No, I didn't.

SG: Erm, and it was, it was quite fascinating. Cos it was talking about the social history 'round the houses, and about the people who built them and things. Erm, and that was built by...it was a combination of 2 things. There were...I think there were 2 brothers, and they owned lots of coal fields underneath the house in the area, it's very rich for coal that area. And 1 inherited the family house, and the other 1 thought he should've done. Or something. And so the 1 who thought he should've done decided to build his own country house 'round the corner from the other 1.

SN: OK.

SG: And the first 1 he built was in early, very early 18th century, and was baroque. But that had the wrong political allegiance, and it was to with the Tories and the Whigs. If you were 1 you had 1 kind of architecture, and if you were the other you had the other.

SN: Uh huh

SG: And he then became, whatever it was, a Tory or a Whig, and he built the neoclassical house on the back of the baroque house...

SN: Mmm

SG: ...about 10 years later. And this is...it was massive, and it really put his brother to shame, the sheer size of it. But the interesting thing was, at the time there were 1000 electors in Yorkshire, and they could all be housed in this place.

SN: Oh really.

SG: Yeah. You could have a big party and have them all there.

KL: Ha ha.

SG: And it changed the, it changed the political allegiance of Yorkshire.

SN: Right.

SG: Anyway, that's well away from craftsmanship and stuff...

SN: Important part of history.

SG: But they worked there and they were very good decorators, traditional decorators. And erm...just put it on the glass...

SN: OK.

SG: ...it's fine there. Erm, and they were...I worked with them, I did the colour mixing and the marbling and the graining and stuff...

SN: Uh huh

SG: ...and they did all the donkeywork.

SN: Right OK

SG: But they're both properly trained decorators, and they new what they were doing and they worked to a high standard.

SN: As in like apprenticeship trained you mean?

SG: Yah. They both did apprenticeships.

SN: OK.

SG: And they both worked for good err decorators, interior designers and decorators.

SN: Uh huh

SG: The older 1 started off as a erm sign writer...

SN: Right OK.

SG: And then 'e took up...did 'his apprenticeship as a decorator, after the sign writing apprenticeship.

SN: Right OK.

SG: Erm, and he's the finer workmen of the 2. An the 1 that's slightly younger was much rougher, but he liked...he kind of learnt to like the quality side of the decorating business.

SN: And are they brothers?

SG: No, they're just friends.

SN: OK.

SG: From Pudsey.

SN: OK.

SG: And they've always worked together as a team.

SN: OK. What are their names?

SG: Alex Bolton and Harold....oh I've forgotten. It'll come to me in a second. Would you be interested in them, cos I can give you their contact details?

SN: No I would be, yeah. I'd be interested in talking to them

SG: Erm, I think you'd find Alex Bolton very interesting to talk to.

SN: OK. No I will. And err, how did you come across them?

SG: Erm, the first job I came to work on was Humphrey Boyle's house, which was why I came up here. And he introduced me to the woman up the valley. He's quite interesting cos he err started Zoffany's wallpaper people.

SN: Right.

SG: He lectures on wallpaper and fabrics.

SN: OK.

SG: And his origin was he...tell me to stop digressing on these red herrings I keep going off on...

SN: No, no

SG: He invented...his family had a hessian mill in Leeds, and he invested, invented hessian wallpaper in the 60s.

SN: OK.

SG: Which, if you're a decorator you know all about. Cos it takes gallons of paint to paint over the top of and things, and it's a *muffled* in the 60s. He invented it, and that's how he got into wallpapers. From wallpapers he got into fabrics as well, and he now lectures on wallpapers.

SN: OK.

SG: He's quite interesting on all these kind of subjects. He's interested....and he lives just outside Ilkley.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: And he had a design, an interior designer. Robert Agard working for him, and Alex and Harold worked for Robert Agard. Lot of his projects.

SN: Right OK.

SG: And I met them on a job for Robert Ogden, who's a very wealthy man from the scrap...from the demolition business, originally. It's all kinda West Yorkshire stuff, this.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, and he has a house over towards the A1 and I worked on that. For Robert Agard, and that's where I met Alex and Harold.

SN: OK.

SG: And started working with them.

SN: Right I see.

SG: And over the last 20 years we've done quite a lot of work together.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: Erm, it's how craftsmen tend to work. Erm, craftsmanship to me is a fascinating area. My father's a diplomat and he was, spent 2 postings in Tokyo

SN: Uh huh

SG: And erm 'e got to know Hamada, who's the most famous Japanese potter. He works in the Zen Buddhist tradition of the *muffled* family pottery and things.

SN: Oh.

SG: And he was a friend of, oh god I wish my memory was better than this, the famous Bernard Leach

SN: Uh huh

SG: Does that mean anything to you? Bernard Leach? First half of the last century? He was the basis of tradition of all studio pottery we get now.

SN: OK.

SG: So all the studio pottery tradition we now have goes back to Bernard Leach, which then goes back to the Zen Buddhist pottery tradition in Japan.

SN: Because they were friends?

SG: Because Bernard Leach was fascinated by it, and he went over and learnt from Hamada.

SN: Ohhh

SG: Went to Japan, and learnt from Hamada and brought the tradition back from Japan to here. And that pottery over there I've just acquired from my mother is from that tradition.

SN: OK

SG: And it's all connected, and it's attitude towards....the Japanese attitude towards craft is very particular. They have massive respect for craftsmen in Japan, traditional craftsmen. And they get given status, and they get given money by the state to teach people, and it matters.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: And it's also connected in with Zen Buddhism, and therefore religion, and everything. It's all integrated into the whole culture.

SN: Right.

SG: And their attitude towards it is, is, is the importance of denying the ego, but the craftsman being important. So as a craftsman you try and do your best within the tradition but you don't put your ego on top of it.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: They don't...you know, you try and not make it an ego driven thing. And, and beauty is not about perfection, it's about imperfection. So if you look at, erm (*gets pottery*) this is a kind of classic piece. It's produced in a random way, because they, they have it, open wood fired kilns, and they can't control it very accurately.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: So what comes out of it is slightly random, and half the pieces will be binned for not being right.

SN: Really?

SG: If you go back to the lacquer wear tradition they have a way of using green wood to turn their bowls.

SN: Uh huh

SG: They then let them dry out and they split. Then they fill the splits with filler and gold leaf.

SN: Oh really

SG: And make an issue out of the fact it's...you know they haven't controlled the process. They've set up a process and let nature take its course.

SN: Mmmm

SG: And then they work with it. And, but that kind of has imbued me...that's where I get my feeling for making things an craft.

SN: Right OK.

SG: And I regard all that as very important.

SN: Uh huh

SG: It's a kind of spiritual thing.

SN: Mmm

SG: I'm not at all religious, but I am spiritual. And that's all kinda connected in with it.

SN: OK.

SG: And then the cultural things are important to me. Erm, that is my grandmother. And her grandmother started off the Royal Society of Women Water Colourists.

SN: Really?

SG: Yah. And she was mixed up, she went to art school, she went to the Slade. And all the female lines, my mother is an artist as well.

SN: Oh. OK.

SG: They've all been artists, and....that drawing over there is by Cedric Morris, and there's a painting I think of his upstairs. And he actually erm was a friend of Lucien Freud. And Lucien Freud was 1 of his pupils.

SN: OK.

SG: And there are all these connections. In fact my fa, I got my father to come and give Cedric Morris's portrait of Lucien Freud as a young man to the Tate Britain, cos I said that's really important. Cos I said that's 1 of the obvious connections between the different artists.

SN: Mmm

SG: And so I think culturally all these things cross connect.

SN: Mmm

SG: And they're all important. And it just g...and it, it even connects, you know with that pottery connection, around the whole globe.

SN: Mmm

SG: And things come back and forth, and you learn...its to do with the build up and cultural background. And to me that's what makes, that what kind of makes life function for me, what makes life worth living.

SN: Mmm

SG: Are all these kind of cultural connections and things. And, being part of it and being a craftsman within a tradition connects you to other people, and the past.

SN: Yeah. It's like an interaction isn't it? That's current, but also related to the past.

SG: Yah.

SN: And so somebody that's learning from Lucien Freud might well be learning from...

SG: ...the tradition that Lucien Freud partly picked up from Cedric Morris.

SN: Yeah definitely.

SG:will pass on... Yeah. And the same with craft and how you paint and stuff. And I find it very sad, y'know the materials you can get for painting with are being changed, because they have all these laws now within the EC about, y'know not using solvents and things. And that's changing the material base that you use for making things.

SN: Mmm

SG: Which is affecting our culture

SN: So does that, does that impact...I mean did you work on St Margaret's in Liverpool?

SG: Yeah.

SN: Did that impact on the paint techniques that you could use there?

SG: No.

SN: Because...?

SG: Because they didn't say we had to use modern techniques and modern materials. It was, cos it was a conservation site and things. They were encouraging us to use the traditional techniques.

SN: Right OK.

SG: In fact with, I've...the person who was....Fabien Priestly who ran the job, and his first sample boards were for erm...I don't know, it's kind of getting involved with the politics of it all, but erm the architects in York,

Ev...something...?

SN: Erm, Evans Clark?

SG: Yah. They ran that job. And their architect when we first went there was a poor architect, in terms of craft skills. Erm, first bit I did on that, first section, was a whole load of graining, oak graining. And I did it with Fabien. And I will take a day to do 1 side of a large oak door.

SN: Really.

SG: To grain it.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, and then I can do a nice job. We were doing, he was having me do 5 doors with paneled surrounds to the doors, a day.

SN: Gosh.

SG: And you can't actually physically put the marks in the paintwork fast enough to do a decent job. But the architect passed it.

SN: Right.

SG: And I think he passed a lot of other kind of very low quality work. And he lost the job. And the second phase, second big phase that we got involved with was the entrance hall in the auditorium upstairs. And the 2 stairwells connecting it. Erm, that was a younger architect, and his father had been a builder...

SN: OK.

SG: So he was aware of the craft, and the tradition of craft, and it interested him.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: And the sample that Fabien 'ad done for the previous architect, of what finishes we were gonna do in the main hall, were rough. And so, you know I just raised the game, cos I said 'no...we've gotto satisfy the architect or else 'e won't pass it. You won't get paid'.

SN: Mmm

SG: So that allowed me to do a more traditional quality finish on it.

SN: Mmm

SG: And that was great, and it was interesting working with erm...we had brush hands on the job. Very basic painters. And I err, I was training them on a job to do granite and stuff.

SN: Oh really.

SG: Yah.

SG: Right.

SN: Excellent.

SG: And I really enjoyed that...

SN: Yeah I bet they did.

SG: But they probably...they'll never use it is the sad thing. Having done it once, that'll be it.

SN: Do you think?

SG: Almost certainly. There's so little demand for it.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And they won't be around and known to be able to do it, so, you know, not part...

SN: They won't practice it...

SG: They won't be practicing it or anything, I don't think they'll ever do it again.

SN: Mmm

SG: But erm, when I was doing that, on the entrance hall with one of these guys, working side by side, and one a the council bureaucrats came in and was complimenting us on the work, and I'm just used to it, because you know, the work I do is quite theatrical, so you get a reaction from people, and they're always impressed.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And I think it was the first compliment he'd had in his working life.

SN: Really?

SG: He was practically in tears. It was quite, you know, it was good for me to see how other people have to work.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, but there we used...the granite finish we used was done with a traditional sea sponge technique and using oil paints.

SN: Right.

SG: ...and mediums. But actually we used stainers there, because Fabien was into...always using stainers rather than pigments. I'd rather use pigments.

SN: Mmm. Pigments are more natural aren't they?

SG: Well traditional. Stain is a fairly modern thing.

SN: Mmm

SG: But it's much more convenient when you have a box full of modern stainers, and you're used to using them

SN: Yeah. And erm nobody as part of the kind of conservation, questioned...

SG: I don't know, I'm, I should know more about, about it all. But traditionally, before they had the big paint companies...

SN: Mmmm.

SG: You got oil, oil, pigments ground into an oil base, linseed oil normally in a tin.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Container *muffled* in it, and you had all your other mediums and whiting and stuff like that, and you'd make up your own paints.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And to get the different reflectivities, you varied the amount of pigment in, in the medium. And you've also got lead stuff to use and the rest of it.

SN: Yeah.

SG: And you made up your own paint. You made up your own colour.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: And I always find it quite amusing when 'eople come up with the National Trust range of colours, saying 'well this is what they used'. And I say

'well actually it's down to Joe Bloggs down the road and what kind of colour he used, and what the client wanted. And the limitation was the range of pigments that he had at his disposal and the cost of them'.

SN: Mmm

SG: Cos cost with pigments is always the major factor. Erm, and I don't think people...I don't get the feeling that anybody's really aware of that, or takes much interest in it.

SN: In pigment? In colour?

SG: Well, in, no in, in the realities of being a painter and decorator and how you apply paint and how you make up paint, and stuff like that. And the Traditional Paint Society, I tried to join at 1 point, and didn't get any reaction from...I wrote to them and things. But erm, all of that's quite fascinating. I don't get the feeling that's going on at the moment, but then I'm not completely involved in the conservation world.

SN: No.

SG: Erm...

SN: No, I think that's probably fair. I don't think people do think about.... I think they think about, there's a awful lot of work that's gone on about the craft shortages and things like that, but it's mainly to do with the supply of skill for conservation projects, more than what it's like to be a craftsperson, and actually...

SG: The 2 is completely intertwined.

SN: They are intertwined, yeah, but there's that...

SG: And if there's no demand for a....the economics of it are very important, because if there isn't sufficient demand there's no point in sort of trying to supply it. Erm, and, I mean I just enjoy doing all these things, and so I have a business life that's not particularly economic in the sense that to make money you do the same thing again and again, you get very good and efficient at it, you get known for it, and you have demand for it.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Well there isn't the demand to keep on redoing it and get very efficient at doing it. And so I jump from job to job and client to client all the time. Trying to find work, and doing whatever comes up and keeping the clients happy, which means I have...I cover basically 3 areas of, of activity. Which each area's considered fairly broad in itself. I do all the figurative work of mural painting and stuff like that, I then do, I do the full range of building work. Err, and erm I do a full range of decorating, cos I even do straight decorating at times depending on what, whether the demand is. And if a client wants a very high quality job doing I'll do that.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And straight decorating is a massive area, cos I do all the paint finishes, and all the basic work as well.

SN: Mmm

SG: And it's kind of ludicrous really. But it keeps me interested and active.

SN: Yeah

SG: It's enjoyable, but you don't make money out of, by doing that. I make a living.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: Errr.

KL: So do you think there isn't sufficient demand in just one of those areas to keep you going? Are you talking about sort of locally, or regionally, or nationally?

SG: This is my own, this is my personal experience of it. But it might be to do with my character and the way I end up working, and I can't disentangle that cos I haven't done the research. There are...I mean I did notice that there's a company down south, erm, Campbell Smith....Fabian Priestly did his apprenticeship with Campbell Smith, erm...

SN: OK.

SG: Have you heard of them?

SN: No. I've heard of Crick Smith...

SG: This is Campbell Smith.

SN: Are they like London based?

SG: They were London and Liverpool based.

SN: Liverpool?

SG: Yes. Cos that's where Fabien Priestly comes from.

SN: OK.

SG: And erm, but I think they're mainly London based, cos I know the s...I've met the son. Fabien's best mate was the son a the guy who owned it, and he sold the business. And they have a long tradition of doing churches and things.

SN: OK.

SG: They sold it to a man who was, who just used it as a way, as a basic decorating company and and didn't make use of its history. But I was looking on the internet and another company's bought the name, a big contracting company...

SN: Oh OK.

SG: And they're selling themselves as doing all the fine work. And I just saw it on the internet the other day, and though 'oh that's interesting'.

SN: Yeah, that is interesting.

SG: Erm, I can get it up and show it to you if you want. Erm, and so they must perceive there to be, erm... Hare and Humphrey's?

SN: Hare and...

SG: Humphreys? Is it Hare and Humphreys?

SN: I don't know.

SG: Another big company. They do a lot of fancy work.

SN: OK.

SG: Think they're Hare and Humphreys. And they...Alex and Harold worked on a job which was then taken over by Hare and Humphreys, I think that's what they're called. Erm, down South of Sheffield, a big country house. And they said the quality of the craftsmen was appalling.

SN: Really.

SG: Yes.

SN: OK.

SG: Erm, the problem is our, our social structure in the country...

SN: Mmm

SG: Is to me a big issue with all of this, because if you're a tradesman you're working class. And I find it quite amusing. I've been in a number of situations up here with the landed gentry, where they're kind of talking to me quite happily as a kind of public school boy who's, might be arty or something like that, and then they discover I'm actually a tradesman, and they stop talking to me.

SN: Really?

SG: Oh yes. They just stop talking to me. You think this is bizarre. I don't get upset by it, I just think it's very strange behaviour by them. And I just see them as having kind of problems and issues to deal with their own status.

SN: Mmm, definitely. I mean you get that...that is erm when is the gentry are the kind of client.

SG: Mmm

SN: Do you ever experience that...

SG: No this is socially as well.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: I went to a Sunday lunch to the north of here, and there was an Earl, a brigadier, and a something else, something else

SN: Uh huh

SG: The wife had been my older brother's girlfriend when they were about 16.

SN: Oh OK

SG: And I went for Sunday lunch, and we were sitting, 'ad a nice y'know drinks before. And half way through the meal I remarked to the Earl that I actually restored two of 'is chairs, *muffled* chairs. And that was it. I'd worked through the furniture restorer who'd done the wood work side of it...

SN: Mmm

SG: ...and then he'd subcontracted the gilding to me.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: So I told him this.

SN: Mmm

SG: He stopped speaking to me.

SN: How bizarre.

SG: Yeah. But if people...people...

KL: He did let you stay for the rest of the lunch did he?

SG: Oh yes. I mean it wasn't his, it wasn't his...y'know it wasn't his house.

KL: Oh right, OK.

SG: Erm, but 'e was just...I just find it bizarre.

SN: Mmm

SG: Erm...

KL: So in his mind he'd turned into client maybe at that point?

SG: No in his mind he just saw me as being working class. I'd, I'd, instead of being upper middle class, which is how I'd be, normally be perceived by people like that...

SN: Mmm

SG: I'd suddenly become more of a working class, a lower middle class person. As such he didn't have anything to do with people like me.

KL: So there's no distinction in terms of the type of trade that you...

SG: No.

KL: ...anything like that?

SG: No. I'm a tradesman.

KL: Yeah.

SG: And erm I find it quite amusing, the whole thing. And it's reflected in our attitude towards craft...

SN: And do think that implicates like when you're actually on a job as well?

SG: No. I think the people who end up employing me are the ones who are interested in what I do. For them. The service I'm providing.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, so that, when you're going in at that level there's a certain amount of respect cos they want you to be capable of doing something...

SN: Uh huh

SG: But (*sighs*) unless they're particularly interested in that area, and the area of interior design and decorating and things, they won't really know what you're doing, and don't really want to know what you're doing.

SN: Right.

SG: And it's a bit like our, you know in this country there's a erm, talking about a head mistress last night, who I went to a concert with, she'd been, had, going to some big meeting with Prince Charles, and Michael Gove. And they were basically talking about the classics, as in Latin and Greek being really important to include in our education in state system. And it goes back to me....that's what HG Wells was fighting in 1880.

SN: Mmm.

SG: He was complaining that we had no proper technical educational system, where the Germans did, and they were gonna be over taking us. Well we got conservative politicians saying that we've gotta go back to what we had in the 1880s, in a modern technological thing. He's not interested in spending money on computers in schools. You know, it just doesn't bare thinking about. It's a rejection of anything that's practical..

SN: Mmm.

SG: ...or in their terms menial or whatever, and mechanical...

KL: You might be reassured because they're talking about how many people are doing Chinese this morning. I don't know whether that's a move forward or not.

SG: Well it's an outward looking move that, rather than going to Greek or Latin, which is kind of regressing.

KL: In state schools, yeah.

SG: Regressing. But to me it's, it's, we've never had the respect for the technical education at any level, but particularly at the kind of tradesman level. And I meet you know plumbers and things like that, who are very clever people. I have a lotta respect for them. But I don't think that's in our culture. To me it's all mixed up with politics and the class thing, and sociology and whatever. And I feel very strongly about it.

SN: Well we've had a couple of people raise that haven't we (*to KL*)? Is that...? Do you think?

KL: Erm, not perhaps quite as forcefully or...

SN: OK.

KL: ...quite so plain...sort of focused on that as a point, but it's probably coming out a little bit, yeah.

SG: Erm, I'm kind of aware of it cos that's my mother's attitude. She says the only properly educated people have done classics full stop.

SN: Oh really?

SG: And I'm the only one in the family who likes maths and physics and science subjects. They're all linguists in my family. They like history and language. And erm, but my brothers all think I'm incredibly clever because I can do maths. And erm, but to me it's about, it's having a general interest...people narrow themselves down so much, and for me everything is connected to every thing else. You can tell from my conversation, where do you stop? Everything has a connection, on and on and on, and ramifications back.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm..

KL: I think 1 thing you were just saying is that, coming out, I think most of the people we're talking to are certainly very well educated articulate people.

SG: Mmm

SN: Definitely.

KL: Y'know, with err very kind of broad range of interests and such like. You know.

SG: Compare them to your average business man, your merchant banker, and they're range of interests and knowledge. You find they have surprisingly little education. But probably radio 4 is partly responsible for that, because if you're a craftsman you have time to listen to radio 4 while you're working.

SN: Mmm!

KL: Haha.

SG: Erm, but I find myself much better generally educated than most of the people I meet, you know business men and people like that.

KL: Mmm. Yes, I'm not sure...we haven't decided if there's...which is cause and effect yet, but it...

SN: No.

KL: I think there's err, it's something we've observed, yeah.

SN: Definitely.

SG: Erm, a craftsman rather than say tradesman is a very specific thing. And it's a thing that's dying in this country. I think in terms of the working class, because they got rid of joinery. This is 1 of my big hobbyhorses. Joinery was an area that was highly trained, and to work out the mathematics, the geometry of putting together the woodwork structure for a roof, could get very complex.

KL: Mmm.

SG: So that on all building sites the foremen were nearly always joiners. Because they were the best educated and most intelligent of the workers on site. And in the medieval period it was the stonemasons wasn't it?

SN: Stonemasons, yeah.

SG: But actually, throughout, up until, was it in the '70s or '80s that they stopped training joiners to the same level?

KL: Oh right

SG: Some time around then. And it was, the big building companies were behind it because they don't need highly trained joiners, and if you look at the, the erm, the building society erm assessments of individuals as to what level of income they can command, erm the basic chippies are very low down the level. They're kind of fairly basic working class workmen in terms of their economic level.

SN: Mmm

SG: Where they used to be very high up. And you can trace this back, right back to the 18th century, if you wanna be kind of very historical about it. When, in the 18th century, all craftsmen were considered quite valuable, cos you didn't have machinery and it was their energy that made things. And so...and they were well paid. And the architecture of the furniture reflects that, because they also design things. And so they design, they can design a piece of furniture with a minimum amount of wood in it.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Amount of effort to put into making it, which makes it very elegant.

KL: Mmm.

SG: Then the Victorian period came along and they had, started building with machinery and everything. And the weight level of the joiners started going down, and the and the quality of the joinery started going down.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And I think there's an onward effect of that, and the attitude towards people and the thing. And they're doing the same thing with electricians now on building sites. They, they found that only 20% of the electrical work on a building site actually involved any electrical knowledge. Most of it is feeding wires through.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Putting in the wires. And connecting them up, making sure it all works and stuff...

KL: Mmm.

SG: ...becomes more technical. And so what they want is to have 80% of supposed electricians just trained to put wires in, and pay them accordingly. Cuts your costs.

KL: Mmm.

SG: And it's....to me that becomes political, cos then you are lowering the quality of life and everything for working class people. You're turning them into a fairly basic, uneducated bunch of people. And less self respect and everything... Erm that goes along with that. And that really annoys me and upsets me. Erm, so you're ending up with....and, and craftsmen all have an attitude of mind which is not at all business oriented on the whole. Craftsmen are poor businessmen, on the whole. They're very good at making things, and that's where they put their energy and that's where their satisfaction comes from. I'm, I'm, I'm a poor business person, and most people I know who are

craftspeople are poor business people, but I think they're all really nice people. I think it has a good affect on your soul being a craftsman. The values it gives you are going to be good.

KL: Mmm.

SG: As a business kind of academic, I don't know how you (*to KL*) feel about that? Err...

KL: Well it's just, it takes you back to that point earlier on where you say about you have these 3 strands, and it gives you a living rather than earns you money. But it sounds as if that's really what suits you...

SG: Oh yah. It does, yeah.

KL:so that's fine.

SG: Suits me. But I want other people to have that satisfaction as well, and respect, and enjoyment from their work.

KL: So you don't employ anybody?

SG: Erm, not directly, no. I subcontract, I get people in to help me. Erm...

KL: Would you...do you....would you want to employ somebody?

SG: Erm, I find it very hard to...

KL: Cos you said something earlier about the difficulties if you did want to employ anybody...

SG: Because I cover such a wide area. How can I train anybody up to do all the different things that I do. I can't.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

SG: It, it, you know you have to be concentrating on 1 trade and doing that continuously...

KL: Right, yes.

SG: And then have enough work to actually share it with somebody else. And because of my experience in '87 when my business overnight disappeared overnight. I thought well 'I'll just be an expert....at everything'.

KL: Hahah.

SG: You know, and that's what I've done. I've just...try and get quality work. And then if I need to work with people I do.

KL: You do the subs...subcontracting.

SG: I just share jobs with people and things like that. I'm quite hippyish about it, I'm no good at making money out of people. And I'd rather not risk that, so I'll share a job, If I need somebody else.

KL: So you'd both of you each work to the client. In effect or....

SG: No we...erm...

KL: How would you do...what makes it sharing rather than subcontracting?

SG: I share the job in a sense, if I quote for a job...

KL: Uh huh

SG: ...I'll say 'right do you wanna come and join me on this job, and we'll share the money on it?'

KL: Oh OK. Yeah OK.

SG: Yah. And then if I put a lot of work into setting the job up, quoting for it and whatever, I might take a bit of extra out of it to cover for that cost.

KL: Uh huh...it's quite informal?

SG: Oh totally informal. If you're at my level of business, the idea of using lawyers is fairly irrelevant.

KL: Mmm.

SG: You gonna take somebody to court? Are you gonna actually have the money to pay for all the small print to be written up? And thought about? No. Erm...

KL: But other people...presumably you've found other people that are quite happy to go along on that basis.

SG: Yah, yah. I mean my contracts with my clients are absolutely basic because, you know, I do it on how I feel about the client. If feel the client's a dodgy client, I just don't work for them. Erm, cos trying to get money out of a wealthy person is just pointless. They don't wanna pay you they won't.

KL: Ha ha.

SG: And you haven't got the financial muscle to fight them. You can be a nuisance if you want to, but that takes effort and energy, and is it worth it at the end a the day? It's for more sensible just to be, you know have your antennae up when you meet somebody and work out whether you want to work for them or not.

KL: So, so how do you get most of your clients then? I mean is it word of mouth? Is it you going out looking for work...?

SG: It's erm, it's about 1 third word of mouth, and erm 2 thirds the website. The website's been very useful.

KL: Coming to your website? Right OK.

SG: Yah.

KL: And how, how long have you found that the website's been important? Is that quite recent?

SG: Erm, no, 15 years.

KL: 15 years! Really?

SN: Really?

SG: Yes, I was 1 of the first craftsmen onto the web.

KL: Wow.

SG: Struck me as being an obvious place to be because it's national, my business is allover the country, and, and advertising in magazines is a waste of money. Trade or otherwise...

KL: Mmm.

SG: ...it just...I never got a single job out of a magazine advert.

SN: Mmm.

SG: But the internet is always there, it's always up, and you can add to it and evolve it depending on what you want to sell. I've actually got 4 websites up and running at the moment.

KL: That sounds confusing to me. Ha!

SG: It is a bit confusing. I'm redoing myself at the moment and I'm gradually trying to put them back into 1. I, I had 1 website and then it seemed to confuse people cos there's so many different things going on on the website.

KL: According to which...

SG: Which trade I was...

KL: ...area of work...

SG: ...which strand of work I was selling.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

SG: Erm, and the limitations of the website design when I first did it. And now I'm doing another website. With another, new domain name, just because I wanted to do it separate and develop in separate from the other ones.

KL: Mmm.

SG: And there's this game that if you have references from other websites to other websites, it raises you in the search engines.

KL: Mmm

SG: So if you have a number of different websites all referring to each other, they help the other websites go up! Ha hah

KL/SN: Haha

SG: It's playing games with the way, with the internet. And erm you can vary the kind of look you put on the websites, and things. But it brings people in. And I do it myself because that's how I could afford to do it.

KL: So that's another skill?

SG: Yah. Well it's being self-employed. You have to do everything. Erm...

KL: So that takes you all over? You, you travel nationally, do you?

SG: Erm, my next job is in, outside Winchester. And that's a conservation restoration job. A country house down there.

SN: Is it?

SG: Yeah.

SN: Right. And is it a private client?

SG: Yes.

SN: Right OK.

SG: Abington Park. Err, and erm they got hold of me through the Historic Houses Association. And err one of the guys who runs it has erm a house over in Lancashire, *muffled* Brusham Hall...

SN: Right.

SG: Parker, or.... *muffled* Something Parker. Written down somewhere, and he...I worked for him 20 years ago.

SN: OK. He remembered?

SG: And erm he remembered me, and recommended me. He got me back involved cos he had some more work he was having done, so I went over and did a quote.

SN: Uh huh

SG: And then I think he met this woman, he was asked by this woman not long after that, and so he recommended me.

SN: OK

SG: That's a recommendation, that job.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, and the nice thing about recommendations is that you tend not to have to quote against anybody else. You just go in and give a price, and if they're happy you get the job.

SN: With a private client, but not with a public...

SG: Public clients are a problem. I haven't had it, but Collette Shepherd who I did live with, she did a lotta work for English Heritage. And her, she had a very particular situation which was that she, they're basically 2 people who did replica furnishings, and she invented the field to a very great extent, because she worked down in Essex with a curator who wanted the curtains done in the old fabrics and stuff, and they started getting them specially woven, and matched up, and tryin' to get it all absolutely right.

SN: Huh, gosh that's expensive business.

SG: It's err, you're talking about 6, 7,000 pounds a window.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, and there was a company in London who were more of a commercial company who did it as well.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: And basically the whole issue was....

Interruption

SG: ...whole issue was that she...gone anyway...erm, was that when she worked with curators, she worked with them on the historical analysis, and then working out what they should do, taking into account what evidence there was, and what happened in other houses at the same period, and whatever. And then she would do them a quote...

SN: Mmm

SG: ...and do the work. But then they said they needed 3 quotes on every job.

SN: Mmm.

SG: How do you do it? The curators can't do a proper specification because they don't really understand what they're talking about...

SN: Mmm.

SG: There isn't the academic research in books written on the subject for them to be able to work it out for themselves.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And so you get Collette Shepherd in and she will then do a spec, and they use it to get other people to quote and she doesn't get the job.

SN: Mmm.

KL: Mmm, yeah.

SG: It doesn't work.

SN: Mmmm.

SG: And it presupposes, sorry I'm very anti-bureaucracy because it presupposes a bureaucratic state of mind, which says that everybody's on the make. And it doesn't actually give respect to the individual craftsman. All craftsmen are different, they all do it differently, and you ought to get to know individuals and what their quality of work is. And if you've got 3 people who hit a reasonable standard, you've got to do a very tight specification.

SN: Mmm.

SG: So that all 3 are quoting on exactly the same job.

SN: Mmm

KL: Mmm

SG: Well, it doesn't happen. So how does the whole thing work? It doesn't work.

SN: No, well we, we... I mean the importance of the architect...cos we've been talkin' about building projects mainly...

SG: Yeah.

SN: And I spose in that example the curator is kind of acting as the...

SG: Architect.

SN: The architect. The importance of the architect and getting the specification right has come up loads and loads of times, hasn't it?

KL: Mmm.

SN: And the difficulties of doing that.

KL: And people getting involved at the pre spec stage to advise people.

SG: Architects are very poor, very poor on interiors, and fabrics. It's not part of their training.

KL: No.

SN: No, no.

KL: But even, even, stickin' more on the building side, we're finding it's still an issue.

SG: It will be.

KL: Just simply on the conservation.

SN: But I mean you experienced it at St Margaret's, because somebody was happy with a door...

SG: Very rough...

SN: ...that you would consider something like 20% of good standard, cos you were doing 5 a day and you would prefer to do 1.

SG: Yah. Yah.

SN: So you experienced that there, an erm I guess where we've come across it before is that people...the architect has involved craftspeople at the early stage, to get them involved in writing the specification, and sometimes paying for that and sometimes not. But you're saying that doesn't really happen in interiors.

SG: Erm, I've never been paid to do a specification, and then when I've done quotes I've just thought 'well they're actually asking me about what I would do'. Then you find they're actually using somebody else to quote on the job afterwards.

SN: Mmm

SG: They're not, there's a dishonesty involved in it.

SN: Yeah.

SG: And erm I always feel like an absolute idiot when I've given away my professional knowledge, then I don't get the work.

SN: Mmm

SG: I had that in a church down in South Yorkshire. They called me down. There was a gilding job there, they had this problem with panel, modern panel behind the altar. And it had damp problems. And then they said they were gonna get it, and they had me down there, doing some work on it. They then said they're you know, get some other people to quote. 'Well fuck you!'. It's a day of my time, all that knowledge that I have, and you're not offering to pay me for it.

SN: Right and they didn't, they didn't offer to pay you for it...

SG: They didn't even actu...I haven't ever quoted on the job either, cos I think they've given it somebody else. Cos I was actually, I actually made this comment when I was down there.

SN: OK.

SG: And I think they thought I was probably gonna be trouble. Erm, I, I, in the end I didn't want the job.

SN: Hmmm

SG: Because of the politics of it all and all the rest of it. It's erm, the problem with a lot of churches is dealing with Parish Council

SN: Mmm

SG: And they're not professionals, and they're trying to get work done at a very low cost, because they have, don't have much money. Yet what they want is something very high quality. And I'd rather deal, do modern work for wealthy people in London.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, you can get better treated by them at the end of the day.

SN: Yeah, that's interesting.

SG: Erm, and I do a lot of work for, you know a lot of the modern stuff I do has been for erm foreign people. And I really prefer working for them rather than the English because of the class issue, the respect you get.

KL: From any particular place? Or would, do you...?

SG: The English are the worst.

KL: Right. So any but the English...?

SG: The worst on....when I first started work in the '80s, 1 of my clients actually had a heart attack and died before I did the work for 'im. Was an Iraqi arms dealer. And I went out to Henley and had a nice meal with 'im, and dining with a *muffled* cabinet, and he said 'never trust the English'. 'E said 'every other country I'd shake hands on a deal, but with the English I want a full contract, all signed, and sealed and sorted out legally'. And 'e was absolutely right. Form my experience. And the English are variety, but I've, with a Greek, or a Swiss person or a Lebanese or something like

that, I shake hands on a deal and I'm totally happy and relaxed. And with the English, I wanna know what game they're playing, and I kind of don't completely trust them. It's erm, it's not a working class thing, I think it's a kind of middle class, upper class thing of, of a certain formality in the way we deal with each other.

SN: Uh huh

SG: Erm, which keeps a certain kind of emotional distance.

KL: Mmm.

SG: And when you get to the kind of Mediterranean countries, and more southern people and whatever, there's an immediacy about the contact, that a handshake is a handshake, you are making an emotional connection. Which means something. It's personal. And I think, and if you talk to them, I talk to them about working in this country with English professionals, and they remark on the distance they always feel between the English and them.

SN: Right.

SG: I don't know, I don't know whether that's a bit extreme, but it's kind of... I was quite put out when the Iraqi arms dealer said this to me, coming from somebody like that, I thought 'ooh'. But it's kind of borne out in my experience of dealing with people. It's personal, when you get in somebody like me and you're doing something, it's actually quite a personal service that you're offering.

SN: Mmm.

SG: On the whole. Unless you're working on a big site. Then it's different. But if you're going into people's own houses and working for them, then it's personal.

SN: Yeah. I spose it is, if you...does it not being personal on a big site take some of the enjoyment out of it?

SG: Yes, but on a...if you're doing something like St Margaret's, the sheer scale of the job and the quality of the building you're working on gives you a buzz. Erm and it's, something like that, where you know it's for the public...

SN: Mmm It's a public building isn't it?

SG: It's a public building and you're giving to the public. And you think 'well, I've done this and it's gonna be here for another 100 years like this at least. And I've left an imprint and it's gonna affect all these other people. It's gonna improve their lives and give them something back'. And I think that's kind of important as well.

SN: Mmm . Yeah. And on that site, did you find the timescales, and working to timescales, and working in a kind of big site fashion, did you find that err...how did you find it?

SG: Erm, I think it's just about being a decent tradesman, and craftsman. It's about working to, you have to do everything to a certain timescale. All clients want you in and out reasonably efficiently, and want to know how long it's gonna take and how much it's gonna cost. It's just doing it on a much bigger scale.

SN: OK.

SG: Erm, but I was working more as an employee on those 2 sites. On the Millennium and St Margaret's site.

SN: Right.

SG: So that was less of a bother to me, but I was actually taking on a certain level of responsibility in both, and *muffled* were seriously under quoted on the St Margaret's site. A lot of pressure.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Yes he paid me hardly anything on that job.

SN: Really.

SG: 'E made it up on the Millennium job which was well paid.

SN: OK.

SG: And part of the understanding was that 'e was probably gonna get that job and sort me out, but to me getting the St Margaret's job up and running and working was more important than anything else. Certainly more important than money.

SN: Mmm

SG: It was too important a job culturally to get wrong. And mess up on. And it's a fascinating building to work on, because so much of it is fake. In the sense that it's papier mache, gold leaf, graining and painting. Erm, go into the auditorium, you look at it and think 'wow, it's wood and gold and the rest of it', and it's all surface.

SN: Yeah, finishing.

SG: Just a trompe l'oeil job. And I like that. It's all part a the fun.

SN: Definitely.

SG: Err, yeah. There's a lot of, there are stresses involved in doing a job on that scale.

SN: Mmm

SG: But I the other sides of it just have their own rewards which balance that out. You want to feel you're doing something like that.

SN: And on a project like that you know it's gonna stand the test of time don't you? It's not gonna get painted over...

SG: Scampston, we were working on that. I did about a years work spread over 3 years there, and there were things like the original 1860s tradesmen had signed their names on top of the architraves

SN: Oh really?

SG: Name, date, and where they were from. And the grainer and marbler 'ad come up from London to do the job.

SN: Oh really?

SG: And I took great delight in adding my name onto the end of his.

SN: Oh that's lovely.

SG: Yeah.

SN: Do you erm...

SG: Yeah?

SN: Sorry what were you gonna say?

SG: The feeling of continuity and things was lovely.

SN: Mmm. Did you recognised their names?

SG: No. It didn't mean anything to me. I haven't researched it at all.

SN: Mmm. Yeah.

SG: I just presumed there wouldn't be any records of them as individuals.

SN: There might not be.

SG: Do you want more tea or...

SN: No I'm fine. I was gonna cough, and I didn't really wanna start coughing. That's why I got my eccentric water bottle out.

SG: But erm...

SN: Erm, what was I gonna ask? Do you make a habit of labeling your work? Or is it just in that case where you kind of added on?

SG: No I don't make a habit of it. That 1 was relevant cos it was historical

SN: Yeah.

SG: And there is a tradition of labeling your work in secret places if you're a tradesman or a craftsman.

SN: Mmm

SG: And also leaving silly comments behind wallpapers and things, so when people strip things they find some joke or other behind the wallpaper. But I think you know, I think if you've been do...if you're working on a particular building then yes.

SN: Mmm

SG: But it's, that to me is part of a tradition, not of making a big thing of yourself but being part of a tradition.

SN: Mmm. No, but I think maybe it's something that you're proud of...

SG: Yah. Pride does come into it.

SN: Yeah, rather than ego I think.

SG: Quality of, pride in your work. Yeah.

SN: I'd like to think anyway.

SG: Yah. I hadn't thought about the difference there, but there is a difference.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Yah. Erm, what else?

SN: What else?

KL: Do you want to ask any more on materials, or?

SN: Yeah, we've asked a few people where they get their materials from, erm...

SG: Specialist suppliers.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, there are a couple of places in London that I use. Do you want me to name them, or?

SN: It's up to you, it's up to you. Some people don't like to name their suppliers, we've found that.

SG: Oh no. I'm totally open about it all. There's Stuart, oh bum, my memory for names is just... Age isn't it? I'm 58 and it's... Beginning to suffer from my memory lapses at the moment. Handovers regular trade suppliers. They specialise in erm sign writing trade and erm decorative finish trade, painting trade.

SN: OK.

SG: They're very good. Stuart Stevenson is good for gilding supplies and art supplies. There's 2. Erm, and Stone House over in Cheshire, Lymm, who are gold leaf suppliers.

SN: Lymm...I've heard of them before. In Lymm.

SG: Err, they're OK. And then there's a new bunch in Wales that have just started up that are quite interesting and I can't remember their names. Haven't...I've only bought 1 thing off them so far. Erm, the people who supply into those particular trades tend to take an interest...

Interruption

SG: Erm, that's the painter and decorator I work with. Gary. He's just ringing up for a chat. Probably. Erm, they tend to take an interest in the craft because they, then they know what you might want to buy.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And so they're quite useful. Erm, and when they have the Association of Painting Craft Teachers get-togethers, both Handovers and Stone House both turned up with stalls.

SN: Oh really?

SG: Erm.

SN: Is there gonna, so is there gonna be 1 of those this year? The Association...

SG: Erm it's in Scotland.

SN: Oh is it?

SG: Erm, I'll turn this thing off. Turn it down.

SN: I went to the 1 in Blackburn.

SG: That was the original 1.

SN: Might've been something to do with you.

SG: Yes I went to it.

SN: You must've told me about that.

SG: That was...Did I tell you about that...I didn't? Yah there was 1 in Blackburn. It was to do with erm...

SN: I don't know how I found out about it now. Cos it's quite niche isn't it. There wasn't many people like me there.

SG: No there weren't many people like you there. It was erm the Association of Painting Craft Teachers with a few extra people there

SN: Yeah.

SG: That was because of erm...

SN: It was somebody's son was a...

SG: It was to do with...the reason why they had it there was to do with the 1860s grainer and marbler. The famous 1. Oh I've forgotten his name, it'll come back in a second. And there are samples of his work in the V&A and in the museum in Blackburn.

SN: Oh really?

SG: And he was exhibited at the Great Exhibition, and he was a staggeringly good grainer and marbler. He was the best we've ever had.

SN: I have heard....

SG: Kershaw.

SN: Yes, that's it. Kershaw.

SG: And erm he's famous, and he's brilliant. And that was the reason why it started in Blackburn.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: Then there've been 2 since then. This current 1 is in Scotland but it is...Scottish people 'ave got involved with it, the college people, and they're kind of sayng they're not interested in the foreigners and people like that. Cos Americans like coming over...

SN: There was a lot of French people there when I was there.

SG: French, yeah. A lot of French people coming over, and Dutch as well. There's a Dutch couple who come over and have a school and things.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: Erm, and it's, it's quite good because the actual, the body of work in Europe, there's less and less work doing it 'round Europe. It's noticeable with the French, they were saying there's less work for them.

SN: Oh really?

SG: Yah. The trade is dying a bit in France now.

SN: Right.

SG: Erm, and they were very, very good the French ones. The best schools are in Paris and Brussels.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, and they're very, both very good. Better than anything we've ever had in this country.

SN: What school wise?

SG: School wise, yeah. Erm, and so that's, if you looked up graining and marbling on Wikipedia

SN: Mmm.

SG: And talked about the English version, didn't mention the French and the Belgians, it's therefore a very 1 sided approach to graining and marbling. Erm, and, and made me go 'round to my neighbour, my mother's neighbour, who's just written a book on Tichen, to do the history of, historical analysis of graining and marbling. Cos there's not, there's never been an academic history of it.

SN: Really.

SG: Yeah. And there should be.

SN: I think someone's doing a PhD on graining at Lincoln. I'll try and find out more for you.

SG: Yah.

SN: I don't know what their angle is, so it might not be history

SG: Well it's the historical side of it more than the practical side of it that I think needs writing about. Cos it's quite interesting.

SN: Mmm. OK

SG: And the use of it. Erm, the Palladian villas inland from Venice are incredible, because for their marbling and trompe-l'oeil. They are beautiful cubes and domes and rectangles and domes, and I don't know, plaster, finished in plaster. And then frescoed with all the architectural detailing you might have. It was a very grand palace, and they're the country homes for the Venetian noblemen.

SN: Mmm

SG: Erm, and it's just, that kind of tradition I think is such fun.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And it's not really been written about in its own right.

SN: No

SG: And it calls for quite a thorough historical analysis of it all.

SN: Mmm. How it developed and...

SG: Erm, and it doesn't exist. Erm the other thing I was thinking about in terms of training, is City and Guilds College.

SN: Mmm.

SG: They do a number of different courses, but they don't cover paint finishes or graining or marbling or anything...

SN: No.

SG: ...or gilding. They do gilding I think as part of restoration course.

SN: Oh really, do they...?

SG: They always...

SN: They do a conservation MA don't they?

SG: Yeah, and I think it comes into that. But there's...and I was thinking, because I have a family connection with 1 of the business managers of the City and Guilds.

SN: OK. Well they do stone carving MA, and a wood carving MA, and then the conservation MA as well. I think that's it

SG: Yeah. They don't cover, they have an art school side but they don't cover decorative paint finishing at all.

SN: Right.

SG: I'm thinking of approaching them because that might be an idea of somewhere to get things started.

SN: Yeah. I mean it's interesting, cos, I think they're interesting cos of the level that they're delivering it at. Cos y'know MA level, whereas most of the other things that have gone on in the past tend to be done in like FE colleges. And y'know the Association of Painting and Decorating Teachers, they're all...

SG: FE college.

SN: FE colleges aren't they?

SG: FE College.

SN: Erm, so yeah, it's interesting that they do it at that level.

SG: Erm, so I'd really love someone to be teaching it at that level.

SN: No I think that you're probably right.

SG: Erm, and erm, just wondering whether you had any ideas about that. What you're doing, revolved around finding people to teach it. I was wondering whether Prince Charles might get involved in it, because he's kind of involved in that kind of thing.

SN: Well yeah he is. And you should look at the....he does have a school for traditional arts in London.

SG: He does yeah. Cos Callum John in York was kind of connected with it.

SN: Was he?

SG: Yeah.

SN: Right, I didn't realise. So yeah, that might, that's something that might be useful to broach. But in terms of teachers, I mean the only other person that I know that might be interested in teaching is, do you know Adrian Bryson?

SG: No.

SN: In Halifax. And he's quite interesting cos he's got like a similar background to you

SG: Uh huh

SN: Erm, in that he went to art college, and then worked a lot with interior designers in London. He worked a lot with Nicky Haslam

SG: Yeah

SN: And then he moved up to Yorkshire, and, well he moved back to Yorkshire, cos he's always been from sorta Halifax area.

SG: Uh huh

SN: And he's, now he kind of things of himself as more of an artist now, and does a lotta like exhibition work and stuff. Erm, and he's married an artist as well. But he's worked on some really err, and he, y'know, worked on some really exciting National Trust proj, well a few National Trust projects, but a lot of the work he's done is like you, in interiors of erm kind of wealthy clients in London.

SG: Mmm.

SN: And quite a lot of yacht work and stuff like that.

SG: Yes, yes. I've done the furniture side of yacht work but not painting.

SN: Yeah well he comes to the university do like a short course on err, well to support a short course with Cole Frankby

SG: Yes.

SN: So he and Cole Frankby do like a double act and Cole talks, and Paul demonstrates. But he's erm his approach to it is really kind of not egotistical at all

SG: Yes.

SN: And always erm, y'know he's really creative, and I just think that at MA level, might be somebody that might be useful to work with. And also Cole Frankby probably. Because he's a very kind of powerful speaker isn't he, he's a very good speaker.

SG: Yeah, I've never met Cole Frankby. I've got his books.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: It's part of being in the kind of way I operate is that...and not actually having much contact with other craftsmen and people in the same area as me, because you're off doing your own work all the time. So you don't meet...

SN: Well next time Cole and Adrian come to York, then you should come too for the day. And meet them.

SG: I'd love to.

SN: Definitely.

SG: I'd really like to do that.

SN: Yeah you should. I don't think we're going to do it this year. We did it last year, probably do it next year.

SG: Should I be contacting Cole anyway, and see if we can try and create something, make something happen in this world?

SN: Before it's too late?

SG: Yeah, I don't know how old he is, but I, I don't know. My father carried on until his mid 80s until he stopped work.

SN: You're probably a similar age to Cole, but I will send you his details cos I don't know his details off by heart. And he is London based.

SG: Adrian?

SN: Bryson.

Conversation diverts to personal info about a colleague. Removed to protect their identity.

SG: And Cole Frankby would be interesting, because he's done the research, the practical work on all of that hasn't he? And his books are very good.

SN: Yeah, paint analysis and stuff.

SG: Yeah. Erm, do you think there's a need for a kind of high level course on this subject? Do you think there's an economic justification for it? Or academic?

SN: Well I think, I think there are a lot of people that are interested in it, and I want to talk to you a bit about that in a minute, and there isn't really a route for somebody to go down. Y'know cos there's, you get interest from lots of different places, people that really want to learn the craft of marbling and graining are things that come up a lot aren't they?

SG: Mmm.

SN: Erm, associated things. And even things like just using traditional paints, because they're slightly different to using modern paints.

SG: Yeah.

SN: Erm, and that is called for on things like National Trust projects, erm...

SG: Mmm.

SN: And English Heritage funded projects, but I'm just not sure how economic it is. And having talked to you, that y'know that concern is with you as well isn't it?

SG: Well money's gotta pay, money's gotta come from somewhere hasn't it? You've got to pay people to do things unless they have a private income, and very few of us have that.

SN: Well yeah

SG: And erm an academic post is 1 thing isn't it? When you can start doing things...how does Cole Frankby pay for his time? Is he an academic, or...?

SN: He's an architect and a consultant.

SG: Right, so 'e works...'e has a professional practice which covers that area.

SN: Mmm.

SG: So, yah.

SN: I think he trained as an architect, and he's kind of specialised...he did a PhD. He did a PhD at York, that's the connection.

SG: Oh right.

SN: And, he did it on paint analysis, traditional paint analysis. So he kind of talked about, y'know, how you analysed decorative schemes, and how you choose a decorative scheme. Cos he argued that before that it wasn't done in an academic way at all.

SG: No.

SN: Erm...

SG: Going down to Pepworth was really amusing, cos there's a '60s, 1 of the rooms when I went was done up in the '60s, and it's done by 1 of the interior designers, famous interior designers of the time.

SN: OK.

SG: And it just completely reflects his version, his period version of the earlier period that he was meant to be doing.

SN: Oh really?

SG: Yeah. So it's quite bizarre. When you're aware of that, erm... Which is, cos it was only until, what? In the '60s that a proper academic approach to interiors, to historic interiors, started happening.

SN: Mmm.

SG: It's a relatively new thing. And erm, so prior to that you had all kinds of fun things going on.

SN: Mmm. It was in, was it Ham House? Really important for that?

SG: That's where, Collette Shepherd worked down there. She did some of the hangings and the closets. The closets of green silk hangings and things, she worked on that.

SN: Right.

SG: I know cos it's across the river from my parents house in Twickenham.

SN: OK.

SG: So I know that house quite well, yeah.

SN: Right OK.

SG: Yah. That was an interesting house because it was one of the houses where after it was built it had its initial moment of importance, the families were incredibly poor who owned it, so never did anything to it.

SN: Oh.

SG: That's how nice houses remain interesting. Is if they were done up at a certain period and then the family are just too poor to spoil it.

SN: Conservation by neglect.

SG: Yes! And then you get left with everything and it's interesting. And that's what happened at Ham House.

SN: Right OK.

SG: And it's important enough to actually put money into and do up wasn't it?

SN: Yeah, no I think it was. Is it National Trust or is it private? I can't remember.

SG: I think it's National Trust. I think it's a Trust property, but it's 1 where they've got it right. But then you've got that other house, which is a really bizarre, which I haven't actually been to yet but I've read all about. It's in South Yorkshire, where they've kept it as it was in 19...

SN: 80 Brodsworth?

SG: With nylon curtains and stuff. And that I think is wonderfully bizarre.

SN: Yeah. It is a bit bizarre isn't it?

KL: Haha

SG: The concept. Erm, I mean it's what's, it's tryin' to work out what's important. I mean you're an archaeologist so it's more your field, but erm... I'm not at all academic. I have a practical approach to all these things I suppose.

SN: Yeah.

SG: Erm, no I mean, yeah. And 1 of the problems is issues to do with what you're talking about, which is issues to do with working on important properties, is the conservation 1, of if you let somebody like me, who's terribly self taught and has no academic background at all, loose on a building, what damage am I going to do to it?

SN: Mmm.

SG: How important is it to keep buildings exactly as they were? They are obviously very important buildings, as in St Margaret's, which should be, evidence should be taken as to what was there, and records kept and everything else. Erm, but then you have a multitude of private houses and smaller houses, which have bits of history, and I mean how important are they?

SN: Mmm

SG: Erm, then you get a cultural problem, that erm, the house just outside Skipton, erm they had a Hungarian gilder working there.

SN: Oh really.

SG: And I went to see his work. He got the work cos he was cheap. And I had a conversation with him, and I tried to talk to him about the techniques he was using, and the style which he was gilding in, and he basically told me to eff off. Because he knew exactly what he was doing. And I said 'but this is England not Hungary and our styles of gilding are different, our history of gilding is different, and shouldn't you be considering that?'

SN: Mmm.

SG: 'No, I know what I'm doing full stop'. So I just thought

'well OK'.

KL: Was that just a private client?

SG: Yes it's erm...yah, it's err Conrad Steeple and it's called, oh bum, Conrad Steeple, erm forgotten the name of the house. Conrad Steeple owns it. They've been there since 900 and something. And they're quite interesting because they're a catholic family and they have a catholic church, and it's always had a chapel on the back of the house. Err, there was quite a strong catholic tradition in Yorkshire. My mother's very catholic.

SN: OK.

SG: And erm, like the Duke of Norfolk 'as always been catholic.

SN: OK.

SG: Erm, It's part of the interesting cultural heritage of the country, is what's gone on there in terms of catholic protestant battles. And what's actually, y'know you think that the Protestants won completely, and got rid of all the Catholics and all trace of Catholics, but they didn't. Erm, there remained a certain kind of upper class kind of catholic tradition. As a minority thing. Erm, and it was quite difficult for Catholics here. Catholics were given a harder time than Jews were. Erm, more anti-Catholicism than there was anti-Semitism in this country. Cos we got rid of all the Jewish population early on, and so there wasn't a tradition of it in this country, anti-Semitism. But the Catholics were a problem, going back to what, 16th century, early 17th century. Erm, all kind of things Catholics couldn't do. Couldn't go to, I mean if you went into the army you had really problems cos a lot of regiments wouldn't have a Catholic. Known as left footers.

KL: Oh right.

SG: My uncle had great trouble in his regiment cos he was a left footer. And they often misbehaved quite badly as well.

SN: That probably didn't help!

SG: Erm, yeah.

KL: So that was relatively recently then?

SG: That was in the '50s.

KL: Mmmm. So it was still an issue then.

SG: Oh very much so. And it's, well it's still an issue now. Cos, erm, y'know, royal succession, they can't marry Catholics.

KL: Yes, yes.

SG: Can they?

SN: Mmm.

SG: But erm, no there are bits of it still left. Erm, but it's quite interesting that it still is around isn't it?

KL/SN: Mmm

SG: Yeah but, down there it's...it's like working in London. My parents house, 1720, it's the first terrace of houses built as a terrace of houses

SN: Right

SG: And it's in Twickenham, 1720 and it's all paneled. Everything is paneled inside. And my mother's got some, a Polish builder in there. And he's putting up a re, reinstating a partition wall. My mother thought it was quite straightforward, agreed a price and everything, and they asked 'im exactly how he intended doing it. 'E was gonna put up a stud wall, plasterboard.

SN: Oh really?

SG: And all the walls are paneled, and all the dividing walls are just 1 layer of paneling. And it's original.

SN: Mmm

SG: And I just said 'no. You've gotta do exactly the right thing'. Said we can't get the deal anymore, so you'll have to use cheap hardwood

SN: Mmm

SG: And erm ply wood for the panels, cos... But I mean it'll look right when it's finished. And it'll go in the right, but the right style and everything else. And I've got the mouldings reproduced and everything.

SN: Oh really.

SG: Yah. But the argument involved with this Polish builder to get him to do the right thing was quite, I had to get quite aggressive with him.

SN: Uh huh

SG: Because he, he, he just didn't understand. It wasn't his culture.

SN: No.

SG: And there's a lotta things that come with your own culture that you don't realise other people don't have because they have a different culture.

KL: Mmm.

SG: And they think they know things. I went to...I was getting some, some, wanted some slate for a worktop for a new bath room for my mother, and went to this place, and it was a Polish guy working in the stone yard. And I said 'I'd like some Welsh slate'. And he showed me some green slate, and I said

'well, that's Brazilian to start with. And secondly the green slate in this country comes from Cumbria not from Wales'.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And 'e kind of said 'no it doesn't. That's the same as Cumbrian, and I said

'no'. Sorry it's the same as Welsh slate. And I said 'no, that's the same as Cumbrian slate. And I said every house in London is tiled with Welsh slate...'

SN: Mmmm.

SG: '...and is any of it green?'. Erm, but, it's, I find it quite difficult having this argument. I love other people's culture over there and learning about it, but when they try and impose it on me in my own country, I get quite nationalistic about it. And quite upset, cos I think it's damaging our own history. By changing it without knowing what you'r doing.

SN: Mmmm. I you think that's definitely a cultural thing? You don't get erm...?

SG: Well he's actually, the guys who's working in the castle down Skipton, he was erm, he was Hungarian, the style of gilding was different, the way he did the actual craft, and the bits that 'e gilded or didn't gild and things were different. And he was working on a building that has some historical value...

SN: Uh huh.

SG: And the furniture that he was actually regilding was erm important Lancashire furniture that's good enough to be in a museum. And I just though, 'mmm, it should be done by an English craftsman who knows what he's doing'. Or a craftsman who's bothered to learn about how we do things here.

KL: And what about the responsibility of the client in this?

SG: Well it's the clients fault.

KL: Yeah

SG: Yeah, absolutely. But it's a private client, private house.

KL: Yeah, so, do whatever they want. But it's a cultural thing rather than the fact that he perhaps hasn't got sufficient experience or skill in the...

SG: Erm, I think it was...he was defensive arrogance. Erm, he knew his trade and he'd done conservation work and things in Hungary and he thought that was it. He wasn't open to the fact that it might be, no had to be different in a different country.

KL: Mmm.

SG: Erm, and he wasn't kind of wanting to learn. Cos I think 'e was being defensive. Probably 'e wanted the work so badly that 'e didn't want me coming along and supplanting him or making out that he wasn't as good as he should've been, or something like that. I don't know. I know that he, htat having the work was important to him for, financially.

SN: Mmm

KL: Had you come across this person before? I mean would you, is this somebody who's like a competitor or...

SG: No, it's the first I've, the only place I've known 'im work is down there, and I just, because he's the local house and my partner was starting to do....I actually did some graining for him. Erm, around that time as well. And so he introduced me to the guy who was doing 'is gilding.

KL: Right.

SG: Erm, yeah so it was just...I don't know, it was something which I find upsetting. Not on a business level. On a kind of cultural level.

KL: Mmm.

SG: Erm.

SN: Yeah, but I just, I wonder if like an English craftsperson 'as ever been y'know not accepted help and advice in the same way.

SG: Oh very likely.

SN: Mmmm.

SG: Yah. The difference being that if you 'ad an English tradesman he might be doing the wrong thing, but he'd be doing it in an English way. If you see what I mean.

SN: Haha. I spose so.

KL: Hahaha

SG: Cos we all do things differently, there's no... I mean 1 of the things that you kind of academics I think put into, is doing some research, or something historically, is 'how they did it'. And it might've just been, y'know, Joe Bloggs from Skipton who happened to do things that way, but Joe Bloggs from Blackburn did it differently.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

SG: Erm, all craftsmen are individuals and they all have their own ways of doing things. Their own tricks and erm there isn't a set way of doing anything at the end of the day.

SN: No.

SG: And if you look at graining and marbling, yes there are standard ways of doing things, but there are an awful lot of things on the side that you can vary, and the gilt that you mix up, you know the mixture that you use for your, as a, when your graining can vary, you vary it depending on what you're doing. And one of things I've realised was that, looking at earlier work is, that they've used very little wax.

SN: Right.

SG: Y'know, the roller wax in graining? Basically you have...

SN: It doesn't go in the mixture does it?

SG: Yeah. You have, wellll scumble is basically a wax mixture.

SN: Right.

SG: The idea is that oil will flow out, you put a bit of wax in it, and it stays put. And it's soluble in the oil.

SN: OK.

SG: And you have turpentine and dryers in the mix, and that's called a gilp. And that's what you do your marbling and whatever, is your kind of mix, medium that you work in, along with your colours.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: And, traditionally you mixed up your own gilp, you made up your own stuff, and they y'know commercial paint companies produced cans of scumble glaze.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And erm originally I think you used that in your gilp, to make up your mixes, which is how I use it.

SN: Mmm.

SG: But then there'd've been a certain kind of local quality grainers, who just take a can of it, add a bit of white spirit and use that as the mix.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: And it produces a mix which is doesn't flow at all, as much as you might need to, which the linseed oil will make it flow out more. Erm, and particularly in, in marbling, I mean I've noticed, was that they used hardly any of the scumble glaze or the wax in their mixes. It's much more free and loose, the way they work.

SN: OK.

SG: And it's erm, see with things like that it's very personal. And if you're going to the level of actually making up your own mix and then you adjust int, it's going to be individual.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, depending on your style, and nature, and experience.

SN: Mmm

SG: Erm, my way of working is very different from other people's. I don't think there is such a thing as a right thing, right way of working. And if you're, I think if you're a really good craftsman you learn from everybody. And the better you get, the more you, you under, you learn from others. So you can understand what they're doing, you can see the possibilities of what they're doing, and bring that on board to your own way of working. Erm, even decorating now you just go on a site and somebody's got some new product or other, you immediately ask them about it all. There's so many new paints coming out all the time, modern decorating paints, spend my life asking people about what they're using and why, and how good it is. Whether it flows out nicely, what kind of finish they can get with it, how it adheres... Erm, and things evolve... 1 of the things about, that I do is I carry 'round big box full of stainers, German make, comes in nice little bottles and is quite powerful stuff. And I just mix up my own colours all the time rather than getting something off the colour chart.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: And you go onto a site now, there's nobody who can mix a colour up. When decorators, traditional decorators, Alex Bolton was brought up, and so was Fabien Priestly, they both were the guys who mixed the colours up. In their company, they, when they were doing, being trained, the way they were trained up was to mix colours. Erm, and now

you just get a machine to do it. Badly. Cos they don't do it an exact match, machines. They tell you 'we can match any colour'. They can't. They get the nearest shade to it that the machine will recognise. And if you do it by eye you can paint, you can repaint an area of wall and it's not visible. You can match it perfectly. And nobody does that anymore. And decorators who are not trained to do it, they don't even know it's, people don't even know it's possible. They don't think of it.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, so there's a whole...I don't know there's... You're area's more conservation and, and, and restoration.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Well I think you need to have a course where you can train people up and have an academic discipline based on somebody like Cole Frankby's knowledge, so you can have a core of people in the country who are actually capable and understand and know what they're talking about. Cos I don't think they exist at the moment do they?

SN: Mmm. You need like a network don't you?

SG: Erm, would a network be rigorous enough in a way?

SN: Well no that's true. That's true.

SG: I mean, if you're talking about really knowing about what's happened in the past, and being able to rely on somebody when you tell them to do a certain style of work, decorative work, that they really know what you're talking about, what the references are, historically and know about the different traditional paints, or modern paints if you kind of doing a place up in a more commercial way, but you want to match the original paints but use modern paints, and you know there are all kinds of approaches that people need to understand about, and if, if the specifier, the architects and the specifiers don't understand the difference, and everybody else, who are you using to set the standard?

SN: Mmm. That's true. There is no standard is there? It's very kind of...

SG: There's no standard. None at all.

SN: ...one off. Every project is decided...

SG: ...individually, and everybody who works on it are just purely individuals who've got their own approach that they've assembled haphazardly.

SN: Mmm.

SG: I mean is there anybody else apart from Cole Frankby who's actually done the research and knows what they're talking about?

SN: I think Cole Frankby's the key person isn't he?

SG: He seems to be the key person...

SN:Haha

SG: Erm, and I think that's kind of important, that there should be some kind of repository of knowledge in this country, before it all disappears completely. I mean it's almost gone in terms of traditional tradesmen who're just been taught it as part of their trade, that's gone. But I don't think you can keep tat going forever without there being kind of repeat

work. But if you have people like English Heritage and National Trust needing people with a certain body of knowledge, so they can rely on the work being done properly

SN: Mmm

SG: Erm, I did that Yarm parish church, and that was kind of a strange job. Erm, and I thought, I was given a specification, I did a quote, and I thought I was going to be told what colours to use, and the rest of it as a kind of properly specified job. And I turned up to start the work and the architect was there, who was a specialist restoration conservation architect...

SN: Conservation architect, yeah.

SG: And the parish council people were there. I think English...was English Heritage there? No I don't think so. Just the architect, and they turned 'round to me and said 'do you have any ideas about what to do? You know, what colours to put where?'. I though

'Oh. I though I wasn't gonna get that job this time.

SN: It's funny isn't it, cos with something like stone they would specify it really...

SG: Well they had no specifications at all. For the paint or anything, and they just, and they didn't even know what they were looking at. Done no analysis or anything, and it had layers and layers of paint had been built up, and it was all coming off with the damp and everything else, and they just sloshed more emulsion over the top. And erm, what I, my attitude was to use a low polymer emulsion, a basic builders emulsion, and cover it up. Cos that way it breathes, and it's not gonna do any permanent damage. It doesn't adhere very strongly, it has got very strong glues or anything in it.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And I thought it was, kind of conservation principles, it wasn't a bad approach. And then I started working on it and I discovered that the surface I was working on was that fragile, that you know, it needed to come off.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Basically. There wasn't any way of stabilising it. So I just chipped it all off. Physically quite hard work.

SN: Yeah.

SG: The area I was working in was a defined area. And then I started painting it and there were a lotta stains coming through, and the thing about most paints that breathe is that they let the stains through. If you put nice stain blockers on, all your doing is putting an impermeable layer over the top. And I didn't want to do that. And I found, I knew of this, this Swiss paint, Classidur oil resin based paint, which is breathable, breathes, but also blocks stains. And it has no, very little surface tension in it, so it does peel off at all. So it's very stable. And so I, I suggested we use that. It's very expensive stuff. And so I ended up putting that on. Erm, but there was nobody to talk to about it, nobody knew anything about it, there was no reference to it, no instructions. Just what I came up with on the day.

SN: Right.

SG: And I wasn't chosen because I was a specialist conservation decorator or anything.

SN: No. The other person is Helen Hughes isn't it?

SG: Is she up in Scotland?

SN: I'm not sure where where she is. But I don't think so, because she used to work for English Heritage. Now she's independent.

SG: There are some people around, but it's quite random isn't it? There's no database or anything for people to work from is there?

SN: No I don't think...I think it's pretty random.

SG: Erm, so I mean that was a church. Yarm parish church was quite an interesting nice church, quality 18th century church. And erm the scheme and everything was just down to me.

SN: Yeah. And you weren't asked to put back an original scheme, or an existing scheme or... You weren't even told, you know, this was done with a certain type of paint, and that's the certain type of paint we want you to use.

SG: They didn't know. They had no records. No nothing. Nothing to work on at all. Just what was in front of me. And they weren't wanting to spend much money on it. They had a limited budget.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Very limited budget.

SN: Presumably it was part of a bigger programme of building works?

SG: They'd done some masonry on the outside, where there'd been some leaks and things. They'd had a guy there most of the year I think.

SN: Right OK.

SG: So I think that was, they got me in after they'd repaired the roof and the masonry work and that side, to stop the damp getting in.

SN: Yeah. Mmm.

SG: And they wanted that corner done up. And they said that the chancel area around the actually altar area, they wanted that kind of brightened up a bit, colour and stuff.

SN: So they'd prevented the leak and...

SG: The area was the side chapel that had the leak in it.

SN: Right.

SG: The paint work was very damaged, and I had to do a lot of scraping away and making good and stuff. But then there's the area around the altar, and that had some damp problems and things, but they were just long term damp problems that they weren't going to get rid of.

SN: Right.

SG: So had to work 'round those, and they had steel embedded, iron embedded in the walls, that was leaking rust through. Rust stains were coming through from well into the wall, and they didn't want to start digging it out or anything. Erm, so that's when I got this fancy paint. Erm...

SN: Have you been back? To see how it performed?

SG: No. It's well out of my way to go to....

SN: Yarm is in Somerset isn't it?

SG: No. It's up in the northeast, it's near...

KL: Oh are you talking about Yarm near Middlesborough?

SG: Yeah.

KL: Oh really? That's not far from me. I'll have to go and have a look.

SN: Mmm.

KL: Whereabouts is the church then?

SG: Erm it's kind of funny. If you go in, if you come in from your Northallerton direction, you kind of wiggle 'round to the bottom of the high street, and immediately you hit the straight there's a kind of funny little left turning, and it goes out and there's like a railway viaduct...?

KL: The viaduct yeah.

SG: And it's behind the viaduct.

KL: It's behind the viaduct is it? Ahh right.

SG: It's a kind of odd place.

KL: Yeah. I've been along a back road, but not actually down the side.

SG: It runs parallel to the viaduct on the other side, and it's just in the middle of that road down the length of it. Is the parish church.

KL: Oh right. I'll have to go and have a look.

SG: It's a nice church. It's worth a visit if you're in the area. But I haven't been up that way since.

KL: No it's quite a distance from here, yeah.

SG: And so I haven't bothered to go back and have a look. I should do to find out how the paint performed. I thought if it hadn't performed they might've complained.

KL: How long ago did you do that the?

SG: Erm, about 3 years ago.

KL: £ years. Mmm.

SG: My memory is crap at the moment. I had a client, private client ring up, and I'd done some painted furniture for her, she rang me up said 'this is Mrs Goldstein'. And I said

'Yes', thinking 'who is Mrs Goldstein?'. I was busy driving down the motorway at the time. On my hands free. And erm, she said

'you did some work for me 'bout 5 years ago'. And I said

'really? What did I do for you?'. I couldn't place her. And I went through the photographs of my work from that period, and I found the work that I did for her, some photographs of it. And that's the only way I could remember.

SN: Oh really?

SG: And erm, I have real trouble remembering. So my memory's not as good as it might be. Erm, I hope I'm not getting Alzheimer's. But you just always have all these jobs, and you're always immersed in your current or your next job...

KL: I'm like that with students as well, so... I can't remember them once they've gone. Not very easily.

SG: For me, well the work I take the photograph, when I finish the job, then I get the money, and then that's consigned to history, forget about it then.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Err if it's photographs that are good for marketing, then I kind of keep on remembering the job because I use it on my website and things.

KL: Mmm.

SG: But I mean I get the oddest of jobs, job I did last year which I really enjoyed, exactly a year ago, was a Madonna for a catholic church in York.

SN: Really?

SG: Err, and it's a statue this high, gilded and painted.

SN: Really.

SG: I don't know which church it is cos I did it through erm Delta who's erm, who carved it.

SN: Right OK.

SG: Err, and she did the carving and she brought the job to me.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: She says she doesn't even think its gone into the church yet. There was some problem with the, you have to...before you put something into a church, you have to get it passed by the Diocese or whatever, for catholic, or both churches...

SN: Diocesan committee.

SG: Or, it's the Catholic Church so I don't know what, whatever the equivalent is.

SN: They tend to have like a err committee don't they, that helps make decisions.

SG: Yeah.

SN: And they're people from allover

SG: Well, it was going to be paid for by the fund that was paid for by the restoration of the church

SN: OK.

SG: And then he, the guy who was organizing it from the church side had forgotten about the VAT

SN: Oh

SG: And the money that was going to pay for the statue went and paid for the VAT on the work. And then he bought, he paid for it himself personally. One of the wardens, of the church. And then it was a matter of getting it accepted by the church to be able to put it in the church, and it's been sitting in his own house for the time being.

SN: Maybe he's grown to love it.

SG: It was an enjoyable job to work on.

SN: Mmm, I can imagine.

SG: But err, he was very un-business like about it. Because it was him paying and he had so much money he wanted to put aside for it. Originally he tried to lower the quality of the work I was doing, and erm, and then I decided I couldn't cope with them and I just wanted to do a nice job. So I did it basically half price. Which is not at all business like. But gave me a lot of satisfaction. Erm, yeah so... Erm... Yeah. Erm. I'd be interested to know if you kind of come up with any ideas about training in this area.

SN: OK.

SG: Or contacts and things.

SN: OK. There's 1 thing I'd like to ask you about. Erm, a group've got some money erm and they can place like a trainee with a craftsman for between 3 months and a year, and the trainee is paid directly by the centre

SG: Mmm

SN: So there's never sort of a formal relationship between the trainee and the mentor. And I was wondering if 1 of the projects that you've got coming up might support something like that?

SG: Nothing big enough to support that at the moment. Would have to be a decent sized job.

SN: Mmm

SG: Erm. If a job was found where they could work on it, and they wanted me to act as a kind of consultant trainer and things on it or something, it might work like that. My problem is I live here, which is miles from anywhere.

SN: Mmm

SG: You might find somebody. If you were in somewhere like York, there could well be somebody in York who would like to train

SN: Mmm

SG: IF you're there, then there's not a geographical problem, but I'm living here and I'm working everywhere. Working across in, down in Winchester, and London.

SN: Well they would have to travel. They would have to...

SG: I mean I'd normally find a place to stay with my family or something like that.

SN: They would have to stay in hotel then I guess.

SG: And that would have to be paid for.

SN: Well they'd pay for it themselves. Cos they would be paid quite well. Bursary, the bursary's quite big, it's not like an apprenticeship.

SG: Right. And then it's just the matter of finding enough consistent work so you can actually teach someone the job.

SN: Yeah, and I know a few, cos the scheme's run before

SG: Yeah.

SN: And nationally. I know that a few people have actually moved from where they're from to go and learn from a craftsperson, and err I also know that there was like a high demand for your sorts of skills but not many people wanted to, or could, offer the opportunity. I think it goes back to the economics of it all.

SG: It's the economics of it, destroys it all. That's the problem.

SN: Yeah.

SG: I can't think of...I haven't got any possibility of a job which is big enough, or series of jobs which would kind of...

SN: You said something about a 6-week 1? No not 6-weeks that's just in my head. You said something about graining on a private house.

SG: Erm, I, that was 1 job I did in the past. But then that was only 3-weeks work for me, on my own.

SN: Was it?

SG: It has to be something big. Either St Margaret's or Millennium, and very few of those jobs come my way.

SN: Mmm

SG: Bigger companies tend to be offered those, those, that work.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: You have to be a certain size to actually quote for them, and Fabian Priestly did it then, and he's actually gone bankrupt since, so isn't capable of quoting on jobs that size.

SN: Right.

SG: Erm, and erm that's how those came my way. And, but decorating Wentworth Woodhouse might start up again.

SN: OK.

SG: And Alex and Harold, that would be, wouldn't be graining and marbling. Would be purely decorating.

SN: OK.

SG: But that's all I can think of. I mean my, I've got a job in Winchester, which is a 5-week job for me. But I might have somebody helping me on it, which would cut it back to a kind of 3-week job.

SN: Oh OK.

SG: Erm...

SN: That was the 1 I was thinking of, the Winchester 1.

SG: The Winchester 1. That's only a small 1. She wants to have more work done but she's got problems with money.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: They do weddings and things to pay for the upkeep of the house, and there's too much competition and things now to, for that to bring in money. S they're quite tight on finances, and they're doing me little by little on that 1.

SN: OK.

SG: There's some gilding and some marbling on that 1.

SN: OK.

SG: It's only, would only be a week or so's work for the marbling.

SN: OK

SG: So there all little jobs. And I've got, what I've got a few weeks work in hand. But then I've got nothing, and then I've got a job in the summer and some quotes going out.

SN: OK.

SG: But, you know, I can live...sometimes I have almost a years work in hand, and other times it can go down to a few weeks work.

SN: Right.

SG: Erm, you have to keep your nerve when you're self-employed. Because you just don't know where the next job's going to come from. Things come in waves depending on the economic situation, and chance. It's a hand to mouth existence, it's not a, it's why taking on responsibility for somebody...when I was in London I was doing the gilding on the furniture stuff, I had a very specific market in the locality and it was enough to keep me very busy and I knew I had work coming in and all that coming in, and lots of different clients bringing in work and it looked pretty fairly solid. But that disappeared in a month.

SN: Mmm.

SG: I had 2 shops I was supplying and they both closed down. And if you had a kind of collection of the '80s interior decorators, I was working for half of the London interior decorators at the time, the big and important ones. I have a stack of magazines this high that my work has featured in from that period. Y'know it was just fantastic, I was, people were ringing me up, interior designers were ringing me up, saying 'can you do some work for me?'. You just hit a bubble, and like at the moment, I'm talking to somebody, and there's some finishes the Italians and the Americans've kind of doing a lot of. You know the polished plaster finish that's been quite fashionable. That's probably not an area you're aware of, the kind of modern interior design world.

SN: No.

SG: This polished plaster is a, a kind of, I don't know exactly how you'd describe it, I've never actually done, it, but they've put it on with pallet knives, and they finish off with a wax finish, and it's a plaster-like lime substance they use for it. And it came from Italy originally, and it's been incredibly fashionable for the last 10 years, and it still is. But they're getting bored of it...

SN: OK

SG: And I've been looking at the wallpapers that they do and I can't easily do the finishes that the wallpapers are doing with traditional techniques, erm, using leaf and stuff. Erm, but these metallic paints and textured paints you can get, there are systems you can buy into from the states and Italy, that produce these modern finishes, and they're very close to what the interior designeres are now using in terms of wallpaper.

SN: OK.

SG: But you can't use wallpaper in bathrooms and swimming pools

SN: No.

SG: And they're also quite delicate, these wallpapers. And erm, expensive. And so I got some samples, samples done by somebody else, and took them to some interior designers over in Cheshire, which are, you know, quite active, love spending loads of money on footballers and people. And they're going 'wow, yes we want these'. Really positive. And I just know that when I get these samples done, over to them, they'll suddenly be a big demand for that.

SN: OK.

SG: Which is well away from conservation and traditional skills.

SN: Mmm. Quite far.

SG: But it's about fashion. The, the, the err mural thing was a very strong fashion through the '90s, and then it died.

SN: Mmm

SG: Suddenly. And nobody wants a mural anymore. Erm it's very strange. And when I talked to Dick Reid who, you know is a carver...

SN: Mmm

SG: ...had a carving company, he said that he was, his business was affected by fashions, cos there are fashions in conservation and restoration fashions. And you just don't think that there should be, but there.

SN: No there are, definitely.

SG: Erm, and so 1 of the things is, as a craftsman, a trademans, is you have to, if you're in a decorative area, you actually have to keep up with the fashion.

SN: Mmm.

SG: You have to learn new techniques and move on. You just about get yourself sorted out on large murals and working out how to do the marouflage, where you paint of site and stick canvas onto the wall, gets murals up onto walls an things. You kind of learn about that, and the next think you know there out of fashion. So you move onto the what's coming in now.

SN: Mmm

SG: It's 1 of the reasons why I keep on stretching what I do. Erm, and you know you're also worrying about what areas other people are occupying. So on the gilding front, I became known as a modern gilder...

SN: Mmm

SG: ...in London, and that's what I did. But when that went out of fashion, there was still the traditional gilding going on, but that's already, niche is already occupied by a bunch of other craftsmen already doing it.

SN: Mmm

SG: So do you wanna try and move in on their area, or do you wanna find an area that's more empty and less people are occupying?

KL: Mmm

SG: It's like a business decision, you gotta work out what to do. It's why I went into the paint finishes side, cos it was easy to get into and there was still quite a big demand in that area, which is what led onto the murals because I then went onto painting murals and trompe-l'oeils

SN: Mmm

SG: It kind of connected. Erm, it wasn't a, a....you never decide to move on with it. It just happens to you. You're kind of aware of what's going on and you pick up on trends and then you, you jump on them cos it's a source of business.

SN: Mmm

SG: Erm, if you have a...body, if you have some kind of organisation on the conservation and the traditional skills supplying, like English Na...English Heritage, erm, you could then on the basis of that, and keeping your knowledge up on that kind of justify, find a business area that you can operate in, because then you wouldn't be competing against all the standard companies.

SN: Mmm.

SG: There'd be presumably fewer people who are then had, had the qualifications to actually get that work. Then that would drive the standards up cos they'd be competing with each other, and the prices would properly remain not too dissimilar.

SN: Mmm.

SG: But it would justify them putting the effort into learning the, the business in detail, training themselves up, maybe employing people who are trained up as well, and you'd have a kind of virtuous cycle being built up, cos the business side would then start functioning...

SN: Mmm

SG: ...in parallel with quality of crafts side.

SN: Mmm. Yeah.

SG: But you've had to have a buy in from the people who were doing the specifications and paying for the work.

SN: Mmm

SG: So they want to pay for that kind of craftsman to work on their project.

SN: Yeah. And I guess then, that leads on well to, have you ever been asked for your CSCS card?

SG: Erm, no. I, I got it, I got a CSCS card for working at the Millennium Centre.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: Then I acquired this new 1, heritage 1, and it sits with great pride in my wallet and 'as never been used.

SN: OK.

SG: Because erm I haven't actually advertised it on my website as something that I have, that I don't know whether... It would be the kind of bigger companies who'd have to come to me then to ask me to work for them.

SN: Mmm

SG: And I never try and sell to them. Cos they're more opaque kind of people to get at.

SN: Right, OK.

SG: That's a marketing problem.

SN: Mmm.

SG: It's 1 reason I want to set up this association, because I want to kind of make it more of a recognised bunch of people rather than just a 'oh can you do this? Do you know somebody who can do that?'

SN: Mmm

SG: Erm, it's kind of making a, building a structure for kind of selling yourself and having it recognised as a proper discipline. Erm, does that make sense?

SN: Yeah. It does, it does. I think the whole....I still don't really understand how people get themselves recognised by the likes of National Trust and English Heritage, but I know the National Trust do offer tenders out to quite small companies.

SG: Yes but you have to have...I don't know, err...

SN: Things like health and safety policies and...

SG: You have to have all of that set up. 1 of the interesting things about....I'm trying to remember Delta's husband's name...

SN: Fred. We've spoken to Fred.

SG: You've spoken to him, and he's interesting. Cos you see in Germany, to actually employ an apprentice, you have to have the master craftsmen exams.

SN: Mmm

SG: And what they teach you is the business side of it, and all of that health and safety side is part of becoming a master craftsman.

SN: Yeah, he told us about it.

SG: And I find that fascinating...

KL: Fantastic.

SG: It's interesting. Has a, a bad effect on 1 side, which is all these systems where you set up systems of training and whatever means that people who don't fit into that tend to then end up being excluded.

SN: Yeah.

SG: And would I become what I've become if I'd lived in a country like Germany, where unless you go through all the right apprenticeships you can never be allowed onto a building site or employ anybody or whatever.

SN: Uh huh

SG: There was a woman I heard of, I think, it wasn't through Dick Reid or somebody, and she'd trained as a cabinet maker over here, and done proper courses to a high level of cabinet making, but she couldn't work in Germany

SN: Really?

SG: And she was German.

SN: Oh dear.

SG: Because she hadn't...didn't belong to any of the guilds. You know, and she just legally, and, and culturally couldn't fit back into Germany.

SN: Mmm, yeah. So yeah, they have a high standard of work but it's very inflexible. And inflexible system.

SG: Yah. It's erm, it's culturally so different from what we're doing.

SN: Mmm.

SG: In this country, and what we've done traditionally in this country. I mean there's, we're following more the American kind of approach, of dismantling restrictions and union structures...

SN/KL: Mmm

SG: ...and having it very free.

SN: Uh huh.

SG: Erm, and I, and I think that's...this feels wrong to me. I like the freedom but I think the dismantling of that has a lot of negative effects.

SN: Mmm.

SG: I mean 1 of the things about Germany, what's happened in the last 10 years, is that when they realised that with the, the competing with China and everywhere else, they'd have to rethink their whole approach, it wasn't just a European competitions they were looking at, they had to operate in a global sense. They went back to the workers and said 'how we gonna do this?'. And the workers have accepted longer hours and lower pay structures and things in the long run, in exchange for knowing that they have a job, that they can carry on competing. But they have to have the trust between the worker and the, and the companies.

SN: Mmm

SG: And because of the German structure, of having workers on the boards and things like that, it all functions.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

SN: I didn't know that.

SG: And...

KL: I did a lecture on it last week.

SN: Did you?

SG: Yeah?

KL: Yes, yes it's interesting.

SG: So I mean, I'm quite well-read about all of this,, I love all this cross information, I think it's all relevant.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, so, I mean, so it's, there isn't any ultimate, there isn't any perfect solution.

SN: No.

SG: But I think if for conservation reasons that people actually want to have decent craftsmen who know what they're doing, you gotta actually make some kind of system, so that you can actually say 'this is what we want', that there are so many tradesmen who can come and say

'yes I can do that for you, I have the knowledge and the experience or whatever...to do it'. Erm, but you want to have the system reasonably open so people can get into that position

SN: Yeah.

KL: Yup.

SG: Erm, and I just think we need to give a...there needs to be a conference or a big get-together of all the people who are relevant for the future of this, and York seems to be a centre for thinking about all of these things.

SN: Well we'd definitely like to bring everyone together at the end of our research and kind of discuss what we've discovered, and y'know, bring everyone together and kind of have that, or have a forum. I don't know whether it would be the ultimate.

SG: Well I think it would be good to get...well for me to make it worthwhile I'd want to get anybody who has an interest in the consumption of the skills, or the training of the skills involved. So I think things like the City and Guilds college

SN: Uh huh

SG: Prince Charles cos he has his own college, erm doesn't he? Some kind of architectural skills.

SN: It's, it's called the erm Prince's School for the Decorative Arts I think.

SG: Mmm.

SN: And it, yeah. I think there's quite a lot of, y'know, decorative arts from all different sorts of cultures, so things like mosaicing and tiling, different paint techniques and stenciling....

SG: Mmm.

SN: ...I think stenciling comes up a lot, and calligraphy and stuff like that.

SG: Yah. Fairly random it seems.

SN: Yeah. Haha

SG: I'm always worried about things getting a bit too kind of pretty and decorative, and not serious enough.

SN: Yeah, well I think, the craft that we're talking about with you, and possibly the fibrous plastering side of things, may be the 2 most decorative erm crafts that we're looking at. And then we're looking at much more building type trades. So we've looked at roof...you know we've spoken to roofers, and lead workers and masons, and erm joiners, and when we've spoken to joiners and carpenters, we tend to be talking to people that make doors and do, and repair windows and things like that, rather than y'know, fine cabinet making.

SG: Yah. People who are building things...

SN: I mean I know they do cross over actually, I know that cabinet makers do get involved in some of the paneling work. I think a cabinet maker did a lot of work at the Rotunda Museum in Scarborough, it's all kind of round, circular museum cases, so it's quite...

SG: That's complex

SN: ...complex. Yeah. So I think a cabinet maker got involved with that. Erm...

SG: But that would've been done by a, by a bank joiner. Do you know what I mean by a bank joiner?

SN: Somebody that works in the shop?

SG: No. Someone who works on bank, as in banking, in the city

SN: Oh really?

SG: Banking level joinery. They had nicer quality joinery done than standard joinery.

SN: What in the Rotunda?

SG: No, in banking. In banks in the high street.

SN: Yeah.

SG: And in the city and places, they all had quality joiners down there. And if you did that quality of joinery you were known as a bank joiner.

SN: Right.

SG: I think. There were different levels of qualities of joinery and carpentry

SN: Uh huh

SG: And you go up in different levels, and that was 1, the highest level, the higher level of erm building woodwork.

SN: OK.

SG: And they could...I mean it's, it's, if you look at the kind of Victorian Edwardian tradesmen, what they were taught, the levels they were made to work to. It was incredibly high. Erm, I think the artistic level of people...

KL: I'm sure we've met somebody who was talking about banking?

SN: We were.

KL: I can't think what it was. Something about the, the difference. Anyway...

SG: Difference in quality?

KL: Yeah. I'm sure we came across.

SN: I don't know. We talked to Firm03SM about loads of work that they've done on banks, so you know...

KL: Mmmm, maybe that was it. Yeah that was...

SN: We were also talking about banking masonry and fixer masonry.

KL: Yeah. No that's different isn't it, yeah

SN: I don't remember talking about the joinery...

KL: Maybe I'm mixing it up with a different conversation, that just happens to have coincided.

SN: Maybe. I don't know.

SG: Yeah

SN: It's new to me.

SG: Erm, and then you train people and then off doing something completely different. One a the...I was working on some really horrendous houses for an Asian family, very ealthy Asian family over in Blackburn, and err erm there was a guy who was in, kinda site foreman type. And I chatted to him, I always ask about, try to find out about people on sites, he's, he'd trained as a joiner. He said that 1 a things that he was taught, to improve his joinery skills when he was a err training, when he was young, was actually erm making billiard cues, snooker cues.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And actually making your own snooker cue, and making ones which are 2 parts so you can you know take them apart and take them with you. And he said that they used to play in a pub, on a snooker table in a pub, and erm the

room was very small, and they had to have shortened cues but they wanted them balanced, so he made special cues for the pub and his mates who played there.

SN: Oh.

SG: And erm, and I talked to him about the quality of his work, and he said he doesn't come across anybody now who could get anywhere near that.

SN: Really?

SG: But that was what was required of his as a teenager, o hit that kind of level of work. Y'know and it's, it's, it's highly skilled.

SN: Yeah.

SG: Yet he's just not doing anything with that, it's just gone that.

NO: And he's not taught anybody how to do it.

SG: Well, the woodwork on these houses, which were 4 very large executive houses on the edge of Blackburn, the erm, architraves downstairs and the skirtings and the architraves upstairs were done with erm oh, what d'you call it? It was mdf covered in erm vinyl.

SN: Oh right.

SG: With a wood effect printed on the vinyl. And they put it in with nail guns.

KL: Oh

SG: Banged it in with nail goods. And they hadn't filled the holes, and they had some kind of silicon filler that they'd used very roughly, and it didn't even match the colour of the vinyl wood. And, these were expensive houses. And I just thought 'this is what they call craftsmanship?'. And I spent 2 days going 'round filling the wholes in the skirting and the architraves, with, with a modern acrylic filler, which you could just wipe off, cos you can't sand cos it's vinyl finish.

SN: Mmm.

SG: And then touching it in so the colour disappeared. And they also had, also had white mastic all along the back of these skirting boards and behind the architraves, and they had dark wallpaper. So you had dark wallpaper, white mastic and then dark brown wood effect skirting and architraves with white lines down the middle. And actually there is a modern paint you can paint mastic with, though in theory you can't paint it, but you can. If you get...there's a particular kind of paint you can get that I found out about. Matched up the colours to the wallpaper, and coloured it all in. Grainer and marbler. I went there to do some marbling.

SN: Oh really?

SG: They've got some curved sections which they couldn't do in the marble

SN: Mmm.

SG: And so I...they did it in wood and I marbled it to match the rest of the marbling. And then upstairs they had some more curved sections of the skirting, which I had to martch to the skirting. So I was doing graining to match vinyl wood.

SN: Oh god! Well I spose vinyl is just a different way of graining, isn't it?

SG: Erm, yes. But I thought'this is bizarre'. Seriously weird.

SN: Mmm, yeah definitely.

SG: An Asian family, and I just thought it's the cultural thing again.

SN: Mmm.

SG: Erm, but it was just a modern house. So you can't complain about messing things up. They're just doing their own thing.

SN/KL: Mmm

SG: Erm. And you just, it's, it's, you know you're coming in from a world which is very specific and I'm operating in this kind of commercial world, which bumps into yours but goes off in completely the other direction as well. But erm, but you've just got to...if the works there and you need the work you just take it. Doesn't matter what it is, you just do it if you need to.

SN: Yeah.

SG: And you look forward to finding the nicer work elsewhere.

KL: Yeah.

SN: I think that's a good note to leave it on. We've taken up lots of your time, it' quarter to 5.

SG: I didn't know how long you'd take. I thought you might take a while. It's quite a big area to cover.

Isaac Peach, Firm15SM. February 23rd 2012

SN: ...Firm15SM. Erm...we are err conducting these sort of interviews around Yorkshire to find out about the relationship between the kinda conservation profession and the wider supply chain, including the public sector, on craftsmanship and craft companies. And so we've been asking a people a little bit about....and I should say that I'm from archaeology and conservation studies, but Kim's background is in management, and erm has an interest in SMEs and how they interact with the public sector. So that's why we're sorta working together. And erm...we've started off really, erm by asking people about their background and how they came to get the skills they have got, and, y'know, how you are where you are.

IP: Right. So you're askin' me...

SN: Your life history!

Laughter

IP: My life history. Right. How far back should we go? I'm left handed. My name's Isaac Peach. I'm a time served stone mason. But I'm currently employed by Firm15SM and I've been for the last 10 years as a contracts manager. Overseeing various projects, errr....more recently a planned maintenance contract for English Heritage, coverin'...err personally I cover lot 5, which is an area that covers most of Yorkshire, but we're responsible for coverin' areas...or lots 1 to 6 within English Heritage's territorial scheme. So yeah, so my background is primarily from the tools an servin' a, at that time was a 3-year apprenticeship, in York College, in stone masonry, banker masonry, an fixin' on site qualifications.

SN: And who did you work for when you did that?

IP: Errr, I worked for a chap local to where I lived and still live now in Ripon, North Yorkshire. A chap called Frank Marshall....

SN: Right.

IP: ...who's no longer with us. He's deceased is Frank. Errr, who'd serv...who actually served his apprenticeship, let me think rightly...somewhere around the Ripon area. But I know he'd worked at Ripon Cathedral for over 10 years, obviously supplyin' masonry an, and obviously other private, private clients err whilst workin' there so.... So I served my time for Frank, err and then moved on, then actually went an worked at the cathedral myself for a chap called Charlie Bacon. An probably, to a certain degree, served another apprenticeship really. Err obviously, the first time wi Frank, it'd been in and around err propert...stone properties in Leeds. More commercial kinda stone masonry. An, whereas obviously when I went back to the cathedral wi Charlie, it was literally aspects in and around the cathedral. So it was more ya ecclesiastical kinda, traditional windas, parapets, y'know. Whatever needed doin' within the 1.5 budgeted refurb of Ripon Cathedral we....y'know Charlie took on an I was 1 of 'is, 1 of 7 stonemasons who assisted so...

SN: Charlie's still around isn't 'e?

IP: Charlie is still around yeah. 60....he'll be 63 or 4 now will Charlie.

SN: Mmm.

IP: Y'know. Finer stone mason I've never seen, y'know. Absolutely brilliant. 'Is trade. And funnily enough set off as a plasterer, and realised that plasterin' wasn't really for him, stonemasonry was, and to a certain degree was kinda self-taught. But again I think, if I remembr rightly, Charlie went to Ripon Cathedral an served a sorta stone masonry apprenticeship there, an came back to Ripon, an, like I say, a very gifted stone mason in 's own right, so... I was lucky really to...y'know to sorta 'ave 2 contrastin' kind of....what I deem 2 sorta separate apprenticeships really under 2 different, certainly 2 different characters yeah.

KL: Was that very conscious decision then? To move from the 1 kind of very commercial sector to the other, or happy chance, or...

IP: I'd love to say, I'd love to say it was Kim, but unfortunately y'know mortgage, an being married at 22, y'know I wasn't that, I wasn't that particular...

KL: Mmm

IP: I'm lookin' back now through rose tinted spectacles to a certain degree. I mean I'm not quite 45 but I can say that I was lucky that I worked under 2, 2 really, like I say 2 very different characters, an 1 a the main diff....I mean personally, Frank was your very flamboyant, larger than life character, whereas Charlie's very quiet and unassumin'.

KL: Uh huh

IP: But at the end a the day, y'know, given 2 different...y'know if you gave them both the same stone, they woulda turned out...y'know they'd a both turned out a different...

KL: Mmm.

IP: ...a similar job. But they woulda come about it in different ways, y'know. Frank was very much kinda by the eye, as is Charlie, but like I say, they just... And obviously the work that they took on. Frank was a bit of a go getter, and maybe take a risk. Whereas Charlie was kinda staid and maybe wasn't as good with the management as what Frank was, but... Obviously different times as well. Y'know, obviously we 'ad the '80s with the so-called boom and everybody seemed to 'ave money spend, an y'know projects took place that probably wouldn't do now because of whatever y'know financial constraints. And then obviously goin' to Charlie, y'know, it was very much a kind of, y'know, y'know, 8 'til 5, y'know I mean it was....you knew where you were. Y'know, we put a scaffold up, we take this down, replace it... Y'know it was y'know it wasn't steady, it was a different kind of approach to a different kind of work, so... Yeah, I mean it was all in a great plan of mine... Y'know...hahaha. Stonemasonry formative teachings. But like I say, I look back now and I think y'know, a real good groundin'. An it's, y'know, I'd like to think, y'know, it's earned me in good stead.

KL: Mmm.

IP: Touch wood so far. Hahahaha.

SN: So it's kind of like a traditional apprenticeship. And did you do like City and Guilds an...?

IP: I did. I was fortunate enough to get the City and Guilds before.... Yeah, I was, yeah. I went on then...yeah I think the train of thought was then, when I went to college, was y'know, City and Guilds, HNC, and if you fancy it from there, and you were good enough, an you 'ad the capacity or certainly y'know you 'ad a conscientious employer, you know you could maybe go on and do a degree. But it wasn't necessarily, it was just that I think I always remember bein' at

York College then, it was always the joiners that went on and went into management. Y'know, it wasn't ever seen as a stone masonry... Well, I'm not bein', I'm not bein' critical. It was just that, y'know, I think as a stone mason you tended to deal with stone masonry issues, whereas if you were a joiner you tended to 'ave that kind crossover an.... I 'ad the opportunity, I went on and did a site managers course, and it was just again, it was just timing. I mean it's always the thing isn't it? You can do what you can do when you can do it. And if you can't and y'know, I probably 'ad the opportunity but at the time it just didn't suit me and, and I stopped at a site managers course. Which again, y'know, I've 'ad pay back from it, but I just err, I just couldn't justify the, y'know the time and the inclination to go towards a degree, so.... You've gotta stop where you 'ave to stop sometimes don't ya?

SN: Mmm, yeah...

IP: But yeah, I was lucky. I spent 3 years on site, err part time goin' to college. It was 1 day a week in the good old days, and then obviously I 'ad to....I think with the emergence of NVQs it was block release, and... Thing was....you just 'ad to fit y'know what ever you could fit. Y'know, some chaps went there full time, some went day release. You just, you all got to the end game, it was just 'ow you fit best for your company. An, an y'know York, people came from far and wide. Y'know from Scotland to y'know it was... There's not many courses, I think there's even less now do stonemasonry, so... You got a great cross section of people and experiences and, and aptitudes yeah. It was a good place.

SN: OK. And what about, what about the training....how many people work for FirmSM15 now?

IP: Firm15SM now there will be...let's deal with the important people. There'll be anywhere between 40 and 50 work-based site staff, and there is....probably about 7, 7 in our office, y'know, Managerial, clerical and so on, yeah.

SN: And you're in the office?

IP: I am.

SN: Right OK.

IP: But obviously visitin' site as and when...

SN: I know, I know yeah. I thought it would be a different balance, that's all. Erm, and what sort of crafts do the kind of craftspeople have?

IP: Do our craftspeople have?

SN: Yeah. Well you're not all stone masons are you?

IP: Well I'd say predominantly that we're, yeah, stone masons, or bricklayers and either semi-skilled people who've worked in and around stone. We do, we do employ joiners, carpenters, but primarily the majority of our work is in and around stone. Like I say, you know we 'ave people who come and go, who we maybe use on a sub-contract basis. Or obviously we 'ave subcontractors who we use on a regular basiss, who we know we can call on their skills. But I'd predominantly I'd say we're a st....I mean I'm not gonna tell you that we've got 40 or 50 all stone masons, cos we haven't.

SN: No.

IP: You know, we've probably got, let's say 7...probably 70 80% of us probably say are stonema...well, let's say 60% are stonemasons, then you've got some labourers, then you've got semi-skilled.

KL: Mmm

IP: But we tend to employ stone masons as a rule, as opposed to roofers or lead workers or carpenters.

SN: OK. And does that mean if you've got erm sort of roofing work or lead work on a job you have to subcontract it out?

IP: Some of it we would. I mean there's certain aspects that we do, dependin' on which subcontractor we use. Some will only touch y'know the slates and the lead, and they don't want to do the timber work and the carpentry. So...

SN: Mmm.

IP: ...like I say, we've probably got...I can think in our north region at least 3 chaps who are, y'know, work 'round the timber. So they would probably pick up the pieces on there. A little bit different roun, in my area in Yorkshire, because obviously for continuity sometimes we will 'ave somebody we can call on in-house, and then just depending on workload whether we 'ave to let them y'know go... So we don't retain as many joiners or carpenters in my area. But we still, y'know, can call on, call on other people's services to cover it as and when.

SN: What about...sorry (to KL)....

KL: Sorry....can I just check those numbers that you gave us? Is that national, or just the region that you cover?

IP: That's....we...I should've explained prior. We cover from the Scottish Borders, probably.... With regards English Heritage we go down as far as Ashby-de-la-Zouch, which is Newcastle down towards Leicester. Errr, so the split probably is....I'm responsible for probably a dozen or 15 employees, dependin' on what time of year, in around my area. And there's a similar contracts manager who's probably got anywhere between 25 and 30 that 'e can call on.

SN: So you've got 2 areas?

IP: I 'aven't got 2 areas, yeah. Firm15SM sorta, we've two contracts managers and we cover...

SN: Firm15SM has 2 areas?

KL: And so those numbers are for Firm15SM in total? And that's split between you and another contracts manager.

IP: Me and another contracts manager.

KL: So you've got half the country each then effectively?

IP: No we've got, we, we cover, we cover the Scottish borders down to there, and we cover that area in between. So let me give y'an example. At the moment we've got a project at Brodsworth Hall replacin' some and repairin' some sash windows. The other contracts manager is of a joinery background, a carpentry background so 'e's comin' down from Newcastle....

KL: Oh OK

IP: ...because that's deemed to be his forte, and he's dealin' with that project. It's not ideal from a logistical point of view, we're obviously usin' local labour to the area of Doncaster to carry the work out, but Craig is comin' down an overseein' that work. Now similarly we could get a masonry job in what might be deemed Craig's area, let's say in brackets which could be let's say, y'know....

KL: Berwick Castle?

IP: Stockton, Stockton Teeside, which geographically could be an area that Craig could cover...

KL: Yeah, yeah.

SN: Hmmm.

IP: Y'know, and I could cover. But it might be deemed that because of the necessities of the project...

KL: OK.

IP: It's a stonemasonry replacin' whatever... I would be, I would be tran... I would be, y'know, make me way there.

KL: Mmm.

IP: And I could similarly use some of Craig's labour. Because, y'know, everything's gotta be fluid. You can't say that's my patch. They're my men. And we can't, y'know, and never the twain shall meet. Y'know, y'know you've gotta be flexible this day an age.

SN: So do you think it's important that the overseer, the contracts manager, has that specialism? Has an understanding of that specialism?

IP: Oh I think it makes it easier. I don't think it's an absolute given. I think, I think it helps if you've got that practical kind of background where you can see something from a practical point of view. But then again, it doesn't mean that... Y'know I've met plenty a people who've err been involved in our trade shall we say, industry, that y'now, haven't come from a necessarily a hands on point a view, but I think you've certainly gotta have that practical kinda sensibility about ya.

SN: Uh huh.

IP: Y'know it might be great for method statements and risk assessments and write it all down, but if ya can't see the project in ya mind, an put yaself in that position, then in certainly makes it, for me, certainly makes it a little bit 'arder.

SN: Mmm

IP: It's hard enough getting' people who 'ave got a practical kind of err y'know semblance of things, to actually get them to write it down. It's amazing, y'know, whether it's the black and white stuff that puts them off, y'know the writin', the pen to paper, the computer.

KL: Mmm

IP: Y'know but sometimes y'know things can be made hard by the fact that you gotta turn a computer on, an y'know this is the way that we must do things now. Y'know, and you can't beat the...y'know you can't beat the spoken word, but at the same time y'know a lot of things now have to be documented to make sure you've dotted every I, crossed every T, Y'know, told everybody who needs to know....so called free flow of information I think they call it now.

KL: Mmm, mmm.

IP: So yeah, that's just my personal take. But y'know I wouldn't say there's a given, y'know, there's no set boundaries for anybody. I think at Firm15SM, I think from what I can see, from people who 'ave, let's say been promoted or elevated towards management, there certainly 'as been that ethod that people y'know, from a trade background, do make that step a little bit easier, an.... You're probably 'ave to speak to my managing director. That's probably why I'm

sat 'ere an not somebody who's maybe got more degrees and qualifications than I 'ave. Who, no disrespect to anybody, so it's... Yeah.

SN: Who is your managing director?

IP: Nick Trotter.

SN: Right. And is he not a stonemason?

IP: No. He's a QS by trade.

SN: Oh is he? OK.

KL: Quantity Surveyor?

IP: Mmm. Sorry.

KL: OK. Yes.

SN: OK.

IP: And then John Worth is the chair of our company. I think you know John...

SN: He is a stonemason.

IP: He is a stonemason is John, yeah.

SN: Yeah. Yeah. OK. Going back to the people that work....the 50 or so that work in...on the tools. Erm, what sort of backgrounds do they have? Are they all apprentice trained?

IP: Err, I can't speak personally for all, for all of them. But I would say that....when I think of ages, I think ages tends to give it away. I would 'ave to say that the majority 'ave 'ad some point served some kind of apprenticeship. Yes.

SN: Uh huh.

IP: Y'know, whether it's been City and Guild goin' back a few years, I don't think we've got as many who'd go back to sayin' they were indentured...carried out a 7-year apprenticeship. I mean I can, I'm lucky enough say that I can say that I've y'know worked under plenty of people who did, y'know 'ave experienced a 7-year apprenticeship....

SN: Yeah

IP: But yeah I would say that, y'know, obviously some a the younger ones've obviously done the NVQ, and we've also 'ad, y'know, work-based assessment to gain NVQ, certainly with the conservation...

SN: Mmm.

IP: ...NVQ sorta level 4 that's about now yeah. Y'know, it's like anything. You gotta, you've gotta move with the times, and you've gotta, you've gotta use the tools that make it as easy or as y'know fluid as possible to get these, to get these things passed an, and attained.

SN: Uh huh.

IP: But yeah, to answer your original question, yeah. I think the majority, just off the top a my head, would've yeah, been through, been through some sorta formal apprenticeship or trainin'.

SN: Right OK. So if you, if you were recruiting, would you look to err....hang on! Do they do apprenticeships with you, or with different companies?

IP: Err....I would say that until, until recently, certainly with the last couple or 3 years, Firm15SM certainly had a very, very, very healthy err kind of attitude and response to, to y'know takin' on the younger element....not necessarily the younger element, I mean we 'ave taken chaps on before well into their 20s who maybe just lost their way, or maybe not...just couldn't decide on what to do. And we've sent them to college, so... But yeah, I mean certainly the younger element, I mean I'd 'ave to get a list out and go through and say 'yes', but I mean I could say a vast, I could.... I'd say certainly a quarter to 30% 'ave 'ad some kind of training that Firm15SM's been involved in.

SN: Uh huh.

IP: Whether it's been recognition on site or sendin' 'em to college. Yeah, definitely. And obviously there's people out there who are no longer with Firm15SM.

SN: Uh huh. Yeah, absolutely.

IP: Y'know unfortunately, y'know, due to the financial constraints that we all experience now, y'know that somebody else is gainin' the err, that 'opefully y'know we set...y'know, sown the seed towards.

SN: Uh huh

IP: Which is, y'know, y'know it's quite sad really. But then at the same time, at least they're out there doin' and producin' 'opefully good quality work for somebody else. So it doesn't necessarily mean that y'know you err y'know you get the benefits of any trainin' that you maybe, y'know applied. It's a tricky one really isn't it? I mean I would like, y'know I would like think it wouldn't be too long before y'know Firm15SM would take on y'know some more apprentices, whether it's in the north region or, or down in Yorkshire. But at the moment I just don't envisage, y'know with the way the climate is financially, that, y'know, too many'll be taken on. We used to 'ave, we used to have a tradition or takin' at least 1 or 2 on nearly every year, if not every other year. But that, y'know, like I say, 'as been restricted.

SN: When that restrict....about 2008 or something?

IP: I would say, I'm just tryin' to think now, we've got one chap who works for us across in Lancashire, 'e's based in Clitheroe, Terry Goodall, 'e'll be 21 now, so...and 'e must've been out of 'is apprentice...y'know certainly out a college for at least 2-years, so yeah I'd probably say it's... We've probably....

SN: 5 years ago?

IP: Well, yeah. Well obviously if ya imagine when Terry got through 'is apprenticeship, we'd've 'ad somebody else comin' through, a conveyor belt so... It's certainly been 3-years since we took anybody else on. We've got nobody now. As far as I know. I don't thin we've got anybody now that's, that's goin' to college or... In fact there's a certain restriction on just bein' assessed on site, because obviously fundin' either becomes harder to attain or, there's just not the emphasis for people to keep producin' people who are trained, y'know... You get to a, you get to a s...y'know, not saturation point. But you get a stagnation whereby y'know you've gotta look at y'know companies fundin', and think 'well is trainin' a priority at the moment?'

KL: Mmm.

IP: Probably isn't. It's probably just actually keepin' everybody, y'know it's probably keepin' 40 or 50 work-based employees in a job. Y'know...

KL: And have you kept the numbers? Or have you had to lose people?

IP: No, we've 'ad to, we've 'ad to let people go. Yeah. Unfortunately yeah.

KL: So that's...

IP: Well I mean the first time...I've worked for Firm15SM, on an off, probably for 15 years, 16 years. And I think 3-years ago was the first time that we've ever been through a redundancy process.

KL: Right.

IP: So you can imagine that really hit hard. Y'know when you've got....y'know, whatever, y'know you go through the process and obviously everybody's in there. Gone are the days where y'know last in, first out. Them days are gone. Everybody's assessed. You go through the appropriate channels, and y'know, unfortunately we lost a couple a chaps. One of, well, yeah. We lost 3 chaps in our area, 2 of which we'd sent to college.

SN: So in your area you mean 15? 3 out of 15?

IP: Yeah. Well there was more then.

KL: Yeah. So if you're doing that...

SN: Yeah...

IP: There was probably, we probably 'ad 20....well, to put in perspective, 4 or 5 years ago I 'ad 37 men workin' in my area.

SN: Really? So how much do you think the company's had to cut back?

IP: Ohhh, you can do the maths. You're probably better at maths than me. So..

SN: About 50%

IP: Well, yeah, I'd 'ave to say yeah. We tend, we tend to keep a few more men up in the north...

SN: Right.

IP: ...because obviously with us bein' in North Shields, you get that kind of postcode kinda lottery syndrome, where they couldn't possibly y'know do that job because they're too far, an their head office is in North Shields...

KL: Right

IP: So you always 'ave to y'know con.... But I mean live and work out of an office in Ripon, North Yorkshire, so... Y'know, and we 'ave 'ad, y'know we 'ave 'ad a presence y'know in and around Yorkshire, because we used to be based y'know at Fountains Abbey. Y'know cos our background is obviously English 'Eritage and the sites that they, they used to err, used to maintain on a regular basis before we were privatised in '95, so... So yeah, yeah, if that math works we've lost.... Still, y'know, you always 'ave natural wastage. People do move on, y'know.

SN: Mmm.

IP: I mean you can't pin 'em down to the ground and say 'you must work for us'.

SN: No.

IP: Be nice if you could wouldn't it? Certainly the good ones! Hahahaha. So obviously if people, y'know, people move on, unfortunately people pass away as well. Unfortunately in the last y'know year we've 'ad 2 chaps, y'know 2 decent chaps who y'know...

KL: Ohh.

IP: Through illness yeah. Y'know it's hard, y'know when ya. Anyway. I won't, I won't digress on that. But yeah, ya do. For 1 reason or whatever means, people either move on or you 'ave to move them on.

SN: Uh huh

IP: And it's unfortunate when ya let, y'know, people with skills, y'know for whatever reason, some you can control and some that ya can't. Y'know, move on.

KL: Mmm.

IP: But it's a fact a life isn't it?

SN: Mmm.

IP: I'd 'ave to say it's probably not as bigger factor in our industry as what it is with some others Y'know, with some others you do 'ave a continual turnover of staff an, y'know we don't. I'd 'ave to say y'know, at Firm15SM, we try and keep a happy family.

SN: We'll you've been there for 10 years, so how long've some a the people been there for?

IP: Ohhh....Neil Fairchild, again another chap from Clitheroe who works with Terry Goodall, 30 years.

SN: Really?

IP: An 'e's only 51. So what's that tell ya?

SN/KL: Mmm.

IP: Hahaha. So...but obviously Neil's still got a English 'Eritage contract, cos 'e's st....you know when they changed over, when the terms changed an they came across, Neil stayed with 'is old English 'Eritage terms. But, I mean, I won't bore you with all that. But the bottom line is...

SN: Oh really? But English Heritage is... Is it English Heritage that meets those terms at the end?

IP: Yeah, it's all to do with. Y'know it's all technicalities...

KL: So it's a kind of a guarantee of terms as opposed to....

IP: It's, it's, it's just guaranteed pension contributions...

KL: Tu, tu, TUPE or something...

IP: Yeah.

SN: TUPE yeah. So he'll be getting a public sector pension still?

IP: We won't talk about pensions will we Sophie? We don't want...

SN: Sorry. No I know, but it's interesting isn't it?

IP: Well it is yeah. Y'know obviously 'e made that decision 15 years ago, probably thought 'well I've paid into a decent pension'... Y'know, some people might say gilt edged. You know what I mean? Some people might say 'we can't afford one'. But the bottom line is they're Neil's conditions that 'e works to, so... But as you can imagine, I'm not sayin'

they've been diluted, but over the years y'know, when you...when you might've 'ad 50 chaps all on the same, I'm, I'm not sayin'; you'd've caused a mutiny by sayin' you've done somethin' that wasn't within your rule book....you can imagine, what I'm sayin' is them boundaries 'ave changed now. Y'know Neil, with Neil's...and I don't wanna get bogged down with Neil's contract and make out like 'e's some kinda stick in the mud, cos 'e isn't...a more flexible an amenable chap, 'e's a personal friend a mine, you couldn't wish to meet. Y'know, but what I'm sayin' is Niel's contract would probably say somethin' along the lines of, y'know, could 'ave Monday Thursday off, y'know, Good Friday, Easter Monday. You know what I'm sayin'? 'E's probably eligble to somethin' like, bank holidays we've probably never celebrated for probably 50 years. But, y'know Neil doesn't an 'e comes to work. You know what I mean? Because we're in a different kind of environmental cli...

KL: Yeah, yeah.

IP: Environmental...

SN: Environment?

IP: ...a different environment financially so... Y'know I think we all move on, y'know. I think if ya become a stick in the mud, don't matter whether it's who you work for... Y'know we can all be a dinosaur can't we? And we can say 'oh well not for me'. I mean it's just every walk a life isn't it.... Some people... We all get to a point where we don't wanna move on. But, y'know, most of our chaps you've gotta move on.

SN: Mmm. Keep moving. You said that Neil's based in Clitheroe?

IP: Mmm.

SN: Does that mean that you cover the whole of the northwest as well? You go all the way to the coast?

IP: All the northwest yeah.

SN: Chester?

IP: Yeah, we cover Chester in our, our maintenance contract.

SN: Oh right. OK. Is that the castle?

IP: Chester Castle, yeah. And err the amphitheatre there.

SN: Is that an English Heritage site? Oh it is partly... Yeah.

IP: I shoul'da brought a map in with all the sites on shouldn't I?

KL: Haha.

IP: There's me come with no paperwork. A manager with no paperwork!

KL: Hahaha...enjoy it, enjoy it...

IP: Must be a misnomer. But yeah, we cover, I mean it's a vast area.

SN: Yeah, it is a big area.

IP: And some a the chaps who work for us 'ave seen some unbel...y'know, unbelievable changes. And quite dramatic, ya know, from goin' and sayin' that every base 'ad ya know 2 men. Y'know, a bricklayer, a joiner, a carpenter, whatever it was, ya know. A handyman. Y'know, y'know, to all of a sudden they were privatised and all these sites shut. I mean you can imagine the skills that musta just walked away. I mean I shudder when I think of some a the

skills. Y'know, don't get me wrong, there was necessity. It was obviously financial necessity that some a these sites just weren't, y'know they weren't budgeted for, and they just weren't, they weren't coverin' their overheads. But at the same time, y'know there was men that, just because they lived in a certain area, we said 'unfortunately, y'know, ya surplus to requirements an...'. So there's been some big changes, ya know. I mean, really, really big changes. I mean, ya know, stuff that people on a spreadsheet might just think 'oh well, it's a number an it's a name, and what does it matter? But from a personal point of view, when I've seen some a the chaps that've walked away. There was still, don't get me wrong, some of them either thought well y'know 'it's my time ta go and sit in the garden, and... y'know, 'tend the veg plot', and do whatever. But y'know there's others who've just thought, y'know, that's spurred them on, and they've gone to become, y'know, they're own private entity and, and been very successful. And ya think 'well that's something that somebody else should've enha.... y'know harnessed...'. And It's not, and it's gone off, it's... Y'know I've come latterly, you know what I mean? I never...

SN: Yeah.

IP: ...touched English 'Eritage. I mean I've never 'ad a contract, but I can see, I can see from my experiences, I can see from both sides, and how it could've worked an 'ow it coulda been different an... But obviously, y'know, it's people who make decisions with money. Y'know, an budgets, an y'know, we 'ave a, y'know, we 'ave a constant err dilemma now. Obviously we deal wi English 'Eritage, y'know whereby they're £5million wortha work, per annum but they could get through. But unfortunately their budget's 2. So what do you do with the other 3? Does it never get done? Is it prioritised? I mean...that's a quandary for y'know an English 'Eritage manager to come and discuss with you, enlighten you. But y'know it's that constant kind of, y'know, what is a priority?

SN: Mmm.

IP: Is a priority a bit a stone tht's fallen off Huby's Tower at Fountains Abbey? Or is it because y'know a path needs icin' at Conisbrough Castle? On an icy day...it's.... And it's them kinda decisions that somebody has to make, and somewhere behind that is, you know, you've gotta man who's time served and spent 30-years within stonemasonry, and you're askin' 'im to flick a bit of ice on a path... No disrespect to anybody, 'ealth and safety's obviously a fundamental, but it's that of fluid kind of arrangement that, y'know...

KL: Mmm.

IP: Y'know, do you send a man to college for 3-years to show 'im 'ow to sprinkle a bit a grit salt on a path. Y'know an this is where Firm15SM 'ave found itself. It's very, very...don't get me wrong, y'know we're delighted that we've got the work, and we though that the work would've y'know turned into somethin' else, but at the same time, y'know this me jus, this is me personally sayin' 'y'know, I sometimes feel it's quite sad that a chap with 30-years experience y'know is runnin' drains and cleanin' gutters'.

SN: Does that happen a lot then?

IP: Does, does...durin' the contract, yeah. But at the same time, that man on the next week, could be goin' and y'know fixin' the masonry, or y'know, fabric of the buildin'. Y'know, it's... You, you've gotta be all things to everybody 'aven't

ya? Gone are the days where somebody, where somebody can say y'know 'I'm a this, and I'm a that, and that's all I ever do'. We've, we've all gotta be flexible, we've got y'know, but when it comes to training....

SN: Yeah. The training's really focused isn't it?

IP: Y'know, how do you, y'know how do I sell the dream? Y'know now I'm a manager, y'know I'm a dream maker aren't I? I've gotta say to everybody and keep everybody 'appy, keep my managing director from, ya know. Gotta keep, ya know, gotta keep everything afloat. And how to I say to 'im 'well we need to send somebody to college?'. First thing 'e might think is

'well do we need to send somebody to college when we've got a contract that...' y'know... But I'll say

"round the corner y'know this might 'appen, and then y'know it's that constant kind of.... Y'know and I've gotta sell the dream to young chap who might see us, and might come an apply. I mean y'know I 'ave an intray with probably about 35 CVs of people who've probably 'phoned or contacted and said 'I'd love to be a stonemason, and I would love to carry...'. Y'know, and it's really, it's 'ard, it's really hard y'know to think 'yeah, y'know...'. And I never did that. Hahaha. When I was 16 I just wanted a job. You know what I mean?

SN: Mmm.

IP: Y'know, and it must... And it's awful for me when I think y'know people've got an interest, an walked 'round Fountains Abbey or wherever they've walked, y'know they've walked 'round Dover Castle, and y'know they might come back 'ere an they might live in this area, and think 'oh y'know, I'd love to do that'.

KL: Mmm.

IP: And I've gotta think y'know 'can I honestly send them to college knowin' that at the other end of it, y'know, we might get y'know a dozen projects a year, but in the mean time they've gotta do...'. But out chaps just roll their sleeves up and do it, y'know. It's a tricky one isn't it, it's a dilemma.

SN: So outside the English Heritage contract, what other kind of contracts do you get involved in?

IP: We do err, I mean, you tell me... I mean how... I mean I can tell you some a the biggest contracts that we've worked, some a the biggest grant owner contracts...

SN: Give us a range, give us a range.

IP: I'll give you a range. The first time that any restoration work was carried out at 'Arewood Castle, Firm15SM carried it out. Contract worth in excess of...

KL: The castle, not the house?

IP: The Castle.

KL: Right.

IP: It's in the corner.

KL: Yeah.

SN: When was that?

IP: Oh, Sophie. Now you're really testin' me memory bank. 2000 and....2003/4 I would've said.

SN: OK.

IP: I could obviously, y'know, confirm these dates, but yeah...

SN: No it's not that important.

IP: No, no but it's just me cos I was only trying to recount it to somebody the other day, and I couldn't remember it as well...hahaha... But yeah, first time that any restoration work 'ad been carried on the castle. Y'know the castle was built in 15 whatever, so it 'and't been touched for 500 years, and Firm15SM got the contract.

KL: And that's, that was the estate who was the client presumably. Harewood Estate?

IP: The estate, the estate was the client and the fundin' 'ad come from Yorkshire Television actually, somethin' to do with Emmerdale, or Emmerdale Farm as we would remember in our day...

SN: Really?

KL: Really?

IP: Not it's Emmerdale. Not it's all glammed up.

KL: So they'd got the money....oh interesting.

IP: They'd got the money...I think it was somethin' to do with a deal, there was some fundin'. It was all, there, there was funding...

KL: But it was private anyway.

IP: Yeah it as all, y'know. You don't ask too many questions.

KL: It's not, it's not publicly....it's not open to the public is it? The castle?

IP: Tis!

KL: Is it? Really?

IP: Yeah. You can walk down there any time you want. Just park at the car park, just park at the roadside at the top, and ya can walk down. Unless, unless due to ignorance they've put security barriers around it... I know it was part a the pla...well part a the plan actually was to get everythin' up an running, and to 'ave an audio tour where you literally came in, you'd've attended some, y'know, picked up the audio tour, and walked 'round. Now I think we left the site an we 'ad it secured by harris fencin'. Now we've left the site, as you can tell, y'know a few years ago now. We've been back subsequently, probably to do other things, fit gilles, y'know, try an keep the site...cos you can imagine the local vigilantes wanna go an daub it with graffiti and do whatever what they wanna do... Err, so things might've moved on. So I apologise, but yeah... As far as I know yeah, you can go down.

KL: Oh, I didn't realise.

IP: You can certainly at least look, ya know from 15 foot and see... You can get pretty close.

SN: You can't go into it?

IP: It might've changed like I say, y'know, I'm sure with a 'phone call...

SN: You can find out.

IP: I'm sure the ingenious can take down a spanner that, y'know, a clip on a harris fence panel. And ya can let yourself in, and I'm sure there's some naughty people who probably go...and there's a spiral staircase, it's quite intact, you can get up to at least 80 foot, 90 foot. And it's quite an imposin' place, and until somebody points it out to ya, cos obviously they've done well to, y'know, to keep it...

KL: It's all hidden in the trees isn't it?

IP: It is. Y'know, there's a 36 bus route that goes from Harrogate to Leeds, and it literally goes past it. And if you're on the top deck, ya can get a good view of it. As I 'ave done many a time.

KL: Sorry, I, I, I'm digressing. It's just I used to go past there when I was little...

IP: No it's, it's nice to talk about. Because people'll say Harewood, and the first thing they say is Harewood House, and you say 'no it's Harewood Castle'. It was the huntin' lodge, it was the weekend retreat for....whether it'd've been Lord Lascelles or one of 'is ancestors I don't know. That's my ignorance to history, but... Yeah it was there.

KL: Mmm. Interesting. So you've got...

IP: So you've got aspects of workin' there...I think the archaeologists....I mean I could put ya, I could give ya names, contact people who could come in and give ya y'know, unbelievable information about these places. Here's a little tit bit. It was one a the first, it was one a the first places to 'ave a slidin' door identified within its structure. Now that's somethin' I learnt at Harewood Castle.

KL: Goodness.

IP: There was a, there was a little kinda recess where apparently this door could be retracted back, and then the idea was then it was shut that way, so there ya are!

SN: No way.

IP: Harewood Castle. One of our foremost projects, err just recently, not too far away, I think I mentioned to you earlier Sophie. We just err renovated the shootin' lodge for the Duke of Devonshire on 'is estate near Skipton, Bolton Abbey.

KL: Right.

IP: Cuttin' out pointing, lime pointing, err replace a roof, some stonework needed replacing, some asbestos sheetin' on the roof, we replaced that with stone slates. Err, put a nice new err queen post timber structure in the roof. So that was a nice little project. £80,000, so... There's, there's somethin' at y'know, the lower end. And then obviously, y'know, other things. I just recently went back on the tools for a week last week, err went an did a project, just an insurance job, stone pillar been hit by a white transit van careerin' through the centre of Kirkcaldy in Fife in Scotland. So, y'know, y'know, whatever it was. A week's work. Y'know, y'know you can...

SN: So you went to Fife?

IP: Fife in Scotland yeah.

SN: OK, cos I thought you were up until the borders.

IP: We do but obviously y'know you get, y'know you get projects an y'know if ya can make the numbers crunch, you can make the numbers crunch. But y'know, we've worked, we've worked, we've worked a lot a places really. I mean

there's nowhere sorta too far south we wouldn't... Ya make contacts. It's amazin' 'ow many contacts we make through people who knew us when we used to be in-house, though English Heritage....

SN: Mmm.

IP: ...and whose actually known someone who's moved to another area, become a conservation officer, and say 'oh, Firm15SM, I remember somebody who used to work for you'. I mean there as one stage, we were getting work down in Huntingdon, which was found for me because my best man lives down there now. He relocated so... It was a good way of keepin' y'know contact with... Err, we got a granary barn, an elevation of brickwork and stonework to take down and replace. An reroof it. So it's amazin' where work can... And contacts and people can take you to here, there and everywhere.

SN: What about like the National Trust?

IP: National Trust, yeah. We do work for National Trust at Fountains Abbey. Obviously National Trust now oversee all the fabric of the estate there. English 'Eritage fund some of the work. It's, y'know a kinda joint venture. So yeah we 'ave probably 2 or 3 chaps up there probably 9 months a the year, workin' on the medieval precinct wall.

KL: Sorry, where's that, Fountains, did you say?

SN: Yeah. IP: Fountains Abbey Yeah. Err, so yeah. An obviously, y'know, until recently, probably 'til...when I say recently, sorta 7, 8 years ago, there was always a contingency for work to be carried out on the, on Fountains Abbey. But I don't know if it's the forerun of the fact that the National Trust's there, English 'Eritage...sometimes there's y'know politics involved.

SN: Mmm.

IP: But there's been no major work done at Fountain's Abbey as far as I can...not on the abbey itself. For 7 or 8 years. So, that maybe puts it into perspective as to y'know...budgets and costin's and priorities. I'm not sayin' there isn't work needed. I mean you only 'ave to walk 'round there with a, y'know, with some kind of experienced eye to see that y'know scaffolds could be go up in x, y and z tomorrow, and work could be carried out, but at the moment, obviously it's not, it's not seen as a priority to somebody so.... But we 'ave done other works in and around the abbey. We've just recently done some work on the infirmary tunnels, shorin', proppin', stonework replacement, archaeological digs. So...sounds really good when I, y'know when I repeat it back to somebody. I 'ope I'm not borin' you with all my detail...

KL: No, no...

IP: ...but it's quite nice to repeat it back cos it's amazin', y'know. We've just gotta chap on...well I'll just digress on this, but it's just to make the same point. We've gotta chap comin' back to work for us who worked for us I think 3-years ago, and 'e's quite keen actually to an NVQ qualification. It's really I think to underpin all the things that 'e's done with us before. I was just reminiscing the other day...to gain 'is qualification 'e 'ad to list some a the site 'e'd worked on, and it was like a who's who of.... Y'know it was quite, quite refreshin' really, cos 'e was tellin' me and I was...and there's projects that you forget about, y'know.

KL: Mmm

IP: Gayle Mill. We dealt with the first phase a Gayle Mill.

SN: Did you?

KL: Oh yeah?

IP: Yeah. Made err roofin'. Y'know, made the site watertight.

KL: Ah right.

IP: Unfortunately we couldn't be involved with the second phase, we just couldn't make our numbers crunch. With err the appointed architect. Ya know, it wasn't through want of not trying. It was just, y'know, what you think you can do a job for, and what somebody thinks you can do it for. Y'know you they're amiss and you can't, you can't hit the magic target. So...that was unfortunate for us, but we've been involved in some really, really kinda high profile...y'know, Firm15SM, y'know.... It's been a great plus for us, y'know it's, and it's a great boost for the chaps y'know, if you're deemed y'know some kinda worth...y'know.

KL: Mmm.

IP: Worthiness doesn't it? If you're involved in a project where other people are showin' an interest. Y'know you're not just tucked away somewhere doin' a pile a stones in the corner that... And we get plenty a them jobs, and that's no disrespect to any a them that...y'know, we did Abbey Park err ruins....there's ruins in a park in Leicester. And it 'ad been, y'know it's been left for years, an somebody'd come along and capped it with concrete, an it was only low walls, the foundations showed the outline of the church that was there. Y'know it's amazing 'ow many people come an say 'oh it's so, we're so pleased to see somebody down', and 'I've walked the dog 'ere for years', and you get all that and it's, y'know it's nice. It can be so rewarding', ya know.

SN: Was that a local authority?

IP: Yeah, Leicester City Council, yeah.

SN: So did you have to tender for that?

IP: We tendered for that yeah.

SN: But you won it...

IP: But they were the good old days when the National Lottery used to give us loadsa money. You know what I mean. That's stopped now 'asn't it?

SN: Oh is that what it was? Lottery Funded?

IP: I think a lot, yeah. A lot a the work that we did tends to be done y'know in partnership with the National Lottery. And obviously I'm just bein' y'know devil's advocate. Obviously they do still give a lot a funding, but it's just you don't see as.... Maybe there's more people now wantin' to take outta the pot, but maybe that's what it is. Or maybe that it's just not a priority. Isn't it somethin' like the Olympics 'appenin' in 2012?

KL: Hahaha. That has been mentioned before yes.

IP: Don't let me go down the vindictive sarcastic line because y'know you probably wanna stop your dictaphones now...

SN: Hahahah

IP: Haha.

SN: Erm no, not at all. Erm what about like church work.

IP: Yep. Again. I'm like a name dropper really aren't I?

KL: Haha

IP: It's great really. Well it's good for our chaps because y'know without them y'know we wouldn't get the work.

Y'know, you can crunch numbers all day long but if you 'aven't got people to do the work... The one I mention is St Andrews at 'Epworth.

SN: Right

IP: Father church of where the Methodist movement started. The Wesley's in 1640 somewhere. Err, we involved in 3 phases down there. Well... there was one phase that we weren't involved with originally, which was I think the replacement of stone work to the pinnacles on the clock...on the bell tower. I think that just happened because I think they were just in a state that needed, they needed repairin' before....well they're obviously the highest point a the church... But we were involved in the reroofin' of the nave, and the chancel, stonework parapets, err roof coverin's. Yknow, we did about 2 or 3 phases down there, so...yeah. That's as good a church work. And y'know, and other projects...I mean Holy Trinity Ossett, err works to interior really. It wasn't really kind of our...there was stonemasonry on the outside, stonework repairs, but it was more internal insulation to roof space. But, y'know, at a given time y'know work for them winter months, inside. All sorta fits in doesn't it. Y'know sometimes th...sometimes our skills sometimes are not the best financial reward, but at the same time y'know...our managing director'll think 'well', y'know, like I say, it's 12 weeks inside at the worst time a year, and you take these jobs on. Y'know sometimes there are financial risks, but, like I say, y'know the days of cherry pickin' and sayin' 'we'll take that one and that one...'.
KL: What do you mean when you say these jobs are a financial risk?

IP: Well they're a financial risk because sometimes you're takin' on...you're utilising the skills that you might be struggling with Kim. Y'know, like I said to you before, in our area we tend to be a stonemas....y'know, tend to be stonemasons. And because with continuity a work sometimes you struggle, and obviously we're all in the same boat, we're all tryin' to find work, or the best work that we can to fit our skills, so, it was deemed that that project for us.... Y'know, we didn't, we didn't go into it and think 'oh we're gonna lose, y'know we're not gonna make the return that we thought we did', but we were probably subcontractin' a lot a the work out to somebody else.

KL: Right.

IP: And if ya 'aven't got that continuity, and if I were to think 'oh, great I'll phone Fred and Jim up cos they're the 2 joiners that we use' and Fred and Jim are busy, an y'know so it was one a those jobs where we 'ad to rely on somebody else who 'adn't 'ad a previous experience from...

KL: Yeah.

IP: And therefore that control to a certain degree goes out of your y'know, it could be anything, it could be just, y'know. I 'ate to say it y'know, it could be a fussy client. You know what I mean?

KL: Right.

IP: It could be...there's that many factors...

KL: So in going for, for that job you'd obviously employ some of your workforce.

IP: Mmm.

KL: Just the, just the amount of subcontracting is, is the risk...

IP: Yeah. Takes certain things outta ya, like I say, outta your control. And it can be just, y'know, what might just seem as something glib like y'know, I remember that project quite clearly, the vicar wanted to leave the church open all the time during the 12 week contract that we were up in the roof space. IT woulda been so much easier for us to say 'no. We need to shut the church. Sorry, but you'll just 'ave to leave...y'know we'll 'ave to leave open a chapel and you'll 'ave to do...y'know your services in...'

'No, no'. at Firm15SM we try to be amenable. Y'know everybody tries to be amenable. Y'know, we leave the church open. What we didn't factor for was the fact that the vicar was gonna come 'round with his hoover and actually we were makin' mess. He was intenedin' that we would 'ave 2 or 3 men literally just hoo... And y'know you can imagine 80, y'know 80 foot up. Y'know it's a massive, you can see it off the side a the M1. It's a massive spire, Holy Trinity at Ossett, y'know. And it's somethin' like that can just kill the job. And I, and I know it sounds ridiculous but it did. You know, we ended up spendin'....we 'ad 2 or 3 chaps there just literally cleanin' up. Because every meetin' every week was....y'know the only think 'e wanted to say was...wasn't how fantastic the work looked, it was just 'it's that dust'. Y'know, and at the end a the da...I mean at the end a the job it was that, it was 'that bloody dust'.

KL: Haha!

IP: You know what I mean? It was 'that dust!' y'know. An a course, we wanted to say y'know, 'well we shoulda shut the church!'. So...you do...hindsight, as we all know, is perfectly....y'know there's some jobs you look back and think 'we should've made a lot more money there. We should've had a far better return', and then there's other jobs an you think 'well we'll never make', y'know, 'this is just literally work to keep us goin'', and sometimes you come out and you think 'oh actually we did', y'know, 'we got through that one far quicker than we thought'. So...

KL: Mmm. In terms of the work that you do, the English Heritage then, what kind of portion...well in terms of your capacity, y'know...

IP: At the moment, at the moment now I'd probably say it's probably 80% of the work that we do.

KL: 80%. And, how long does that contract run for? Y'know how long...

IP: It's a 5-year fixed term contract.

KL: %, 5-year fixed term. So, are you coming up the end of that or...?

IP: No we're 'alf way through. About 2 and 'alf years through. Y'know, I think they would like to...well, I don't think I'm speaking outta turn. I think they would like to sit down, negotiate there's a possible 2-year extension to that, and I think they would like...

KL: Right

IP: ...because of the work that we've carried out and, there's response work as well whereby...y'know, it could be a 2 or 4-hour, 24-hour call out to attend a blocked drain, to attend a piece of masonry that's careered off at Byland Abbey and missed somebody's...

KL: An, and 'ave you got the, the full contract. You do everything? Or, are there other contractors working for English Heritage as well.

IP: We do the buil...

KL: Is it like monopoly or...

IP: Yeah. We do the buildin' and civil engineerin' and the M&E in lots 1 to 5.

KL: Right

IP: And the area lot 6, which is the 5 sites down the...in the East Midlands, which spread from Lincoln as far south as Ashby-de-la-Zouch. I can name them. Lincoln, Hardwick Old Hall, Bolsover Castle...Lincoln, I've mentioned Lincoln, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and there's one more that's gonna allude me now. Peverill Castle. The remote Peverill Castle.

KL: Mmm.

IP: Those, those are the sites. And on them sites we only cover the buidin' and civil engineerin'. The M&E was deemed to be too much for our subcontractor who...

KL: Is that maintenance and something...

IP: Maint...yeah, it's planned maintenance an...

KL: So, so it's split basically into those 2 areas. And you've got all of it for 5...

IP: 1 to 5, lots 1 to 5.

KL: And just the building...

IP: Yeah. In lot 6.

KL: And that's everything? Is it? I mean what about things like grass cutting?

IP: That goes out to somebody else

KL: So that's completely different. I'm just thinking of maintenance and... Right.

IP: So the maintenance, the maintenance buildin' and civic engineerin' side can be roddin' drains, cleanin' gutters, err givin' timber work a lick of paint, stain...

KL: Mmm.

IP: Err checkin', err inspection of y'know roof, roof areas. Flat roofs. It can be...

KL: So that's much more, sounds much more like standard type work then.

IP: It is. Yeah. It's literally just maintenance.

KL: Right.

IP: Monthly. Can be yearly, y'know, you can imagine, some sites are quite...

KL: But your men will work on both a those contracts. You don't therefore...

IP: We do the buildin' and civil engineerin'. We 'ave a subcontractor that does the M&E. Obviously...because it's just...

KL: OK. I'm just thinkin' about earlier, sometimes y'know you've got them going and gritting paths, and, and what have you.

IP: That could, that could be a response.

KL: Right.

IP: So you can imagine, the weather, I'll just explain to you, it's quite cold, y'know February it could be site, site is being shut or now what's 'appened, say, going back to it being a fluid contract, everything's so fluid is that this last winter for the first time English 'Eritage 'ave shut the sites, some sites that were open during the winter are now only open on a weekend.

KL: Mmm.

IP: So we could get a call out on a Sunday afternoon to say a path's not been gritted, or this is blocked, or the lights could be out, or...'can you come and help with this. The hand rail's fallen off the wall'.

KL: I know they have changed their hours quite a lot recently, but was that before your contract came into operation.

IP: No, it's just been recently.

KL: So will that affect the terms of your contract then, in terms of...

IP: No only the...obviously when we go and carry out planned works during the week. Y'know most a these sites are shut, so...

KL: Ok. So that's not affected. Right.

IP: ...we 'ave to gain our own access. We 'ave to gain our own access. And obviously if the site's aren't open and people aren't goin' in, obviously they can't be hurt by anything that does go wrong.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

IP: But at the same time, when they're open on Saturday, it could be that there's a lump of masonry fall off. I mean you just can't...who can second guess? I mean we've just done, we've just done exactly the same at Byland Abbey, where you know some masonry 'as fallen off of the rose window at the end...

KL: Oh right, yeah.

IP: Y'know, there's been some stonework sheer off and we've 'ad to go over there and do an inspection an...

KL: Mmm So if it's 80% then, obviously that's a huge...

IP: Obviously when I say 80%...

KL:there's a big kind of dependent relationship.

IP: It is yeah. When I say 80%, I mean I've gotta put that into context...that's probably within the last sorta like 3-years. As you can imagine, the financial down turn that we've experienced...y'know we've gone from doing projects y'know that I've mentioned there. Y'know £350,000 church jobs. All of a sudden, one the finances aren't there, and because, because it's so competitive...

KL: Yeah.

IP: Y'know, there's a lot a people out there...

KL: So you've become more dependent on that at the moment?

IP: Oh, certainly.

KL: So, this next period is gonna be quite crucial in terms of...

IP: It is. Obviously we'd love to think that we got the extension because y'know work's work and everybody needs what they can do, and the fact that y'know, obviously we've done, y'know, I'd like to say y'know, we've give them a good service for 2 and a half years.

KL: Mmm. And how kind of actively do you go out looking for other work. Is it...

IP: Well I think, I think our managing director an our other QS, our commercial director, I think they would say that there's not many things that they won't put some numbers to, so... But it is, it's the same. I mean, y'know, I can 'phone architects now we deal with all the time, and they'll say it's... They 'phone us and we 'phone them. And it's that mutual kind of 'well 'ave you anything on your drawing board?'

KL: Right OK.

IP: Y'know, cos we're sayin' is anythin' on your drawing board that we can price, so... Y'know, I think...I don't think it's...I don't think it's anything...y'know we don't take it personally, y'know it's just the fact that money, y'know, and fundin' comes from y'know...it only takes English 'Eritage to say

'right, y'know, this 2-years it's, y'know, buildin's at risk..'

KL: Mmm

IP: Y'know, places of worship. I mean they come up with all these different ventures to say 'right that's now given our priority, so...'. Obviously we try and tap into that, and say

'right, well y'know', if it is all y'know architec...let's say agricultural buildin's of North Yorkshire then obviously we try and say 'well, y'know, we've done Gayle Mill. We've done...'

KL: Mmm.

IP: '...y'know, shootin' lodge'. Y'know, we, y'know, we can bend and we can...but at the same time, if the money's not there and the projects aren't out there, you know you can 'ave a losin' run of returnin' 15 tenders and not even getting' a...

KL: And, and what about the competition then? Are you finding that there's more people coming in to compete against you, or... from further afield...different size firms...?

IP: Well I think...yeah, I think there's always that, and obviously y'know like I just said earlier, y'know, we made people redundant, and you can't control the people who don't work for you. It's 'ard enough controllin' the people who do work for you. So y'know if they go off and though wanna become freelance and set up their own stonemasonry firm goin' on the experience they've 'ad, y'know, that is, that is life. So, yeah I mean there's always competition out there.

KL: Mmm.

IP: I mean, I think y'know...I'm not sayin' that we're different and we're unique. And we 'ave certain skills that we can, that we can provide that y'know other companies 'ave different skills, so I mean I think, I think there is work out there.

Just, one it's harder sometimes to find, y'know and even when you do find it, like you say... I think, one thing that does tend to 'appen in a recession is that I think that, I'm not sayin' that the err...it's not a case of expectation...I think sometimes what 'appen is that you can 'ave projects that can go out to contractors who can maybe persuade an architect to get their name on a tender list, y'know what I mean? And they could maybe look at it, they could maybe look at it, one through rose tinted spectacles and think 'oh yeah, this is the kind've work I would like to get into'. You know what I mean? Sometimes...I'm not sayin' they buy a job, but sometimes can look into it and don't probably see all the pitfalls y'know what I mean? But on any given day we'd all price somethin' quite differently so... Y'know I think sometimes when there is a recession, y'know architects can think

'well we'll send it out to 7 contractors, an they can get even more of a cross section of...'

KL: Mmm.

IP: If you know what....'ow people interpret y'know 'ow the work can be carried out, so... Y'know, we do find that sometimes we, we, we're tenderin' against y'know general contractors, y'know. An you think 'well this is maybe more than general buildin', it is more kind of y'know historic work, or...'. But who are we to, who are we to control the client, to say who 'e can and can't send 'is...

KL: What about the specifications? Are you findin' that the specifications are allowing that to happen? Because there perhaps not recognising sufficiently the, the kind of heritage requirements, or the skills required or...

IP: It's, again...again, I mean I'm not wishin' to sound defeatist but it's like the vicious circle innit? I mean I don't know many...I don't know...let's say our client's the architect, for want of a better term.I mean obviously there's somebody at the top of the chain...

KL: Yeah.

IP: ..who's givin' the money. But our client is invariably is the architect. I don't know too many architects, if I was to 'phone them back and tell them that the specification was wrong would wanna send me another one. You know what I mean? We can all be funny can't we? I mean I can see to mason a piece of stone and do a work completely different from Sophie, who might think 'well I would do that pointin' there, and then I would do that roofin' there. And I would...'. So...I'd say the specifications that I see are fine. Y'know, it's just sometimes that the contractor might look at the specification and say 'well I can do that in a week'. We could say

'that'll take 7 days'. Somebody else'll say 10 days. It's all subjective isn't it? It's 'ow you...you can only come on your past experiences. Y'know, sometimes you can 'ave too many experiences can't ya? You can think 'well actually we know this architect'll do this, and we know that when we get on the job 'e'll actually turn around and say'

'no. Instead a doin' 20% stonework...'. We know the job, we know the fab...we done...we've done the phase 1. We know that'll become that. I mean you rate it through, but in the back a ya mind you, you might think

'well, we lost out on that on phase 1'. So, y'know, but somebody else might not've 'ad that experience. And they'll say

'I'll give you that as a pointin' rate'. And it's...like I say, it's such a s...contractin' is, it's...you live and die by the numbers on the tender sheet don't you?

KL: Mmm.

IP: It's... You know, you've gotta... But I mean the specifications are always pretty there or thereabouts. I mean some of 'em are just repeat, repeat, repeat. I mean it's, y'know...

SN: What, generic?

IP: Well some of 'em are. I mean if it's cuttin' out an pointin'... I mean you can't can't go into too much detail. I mean ya, ya tender document'd end up like err...y'know what I mean...it could be like cut out an point stonework, make sure arrises are clean, cut back to a depth of 35mm...

SN: It would make it easier to compete on a more even keel, wouldn't it?

IP: But what I'm sayin' is it doesn't matter what...it doesn't matter what tender document you see...

SN: Mmm

IP: ...it's how you see it with your eyes, 'ow Kim sees it with 'er eyes, and 'ow I see it with my eyes as regards experience.

SN: Even if it's in such a high level of detail?

IP: I'm not bein' funny, but to me more detail makes more....y'know, if you factor something' in and you write War and Peace on 'ow to cut out...I mean could...I'm not sayin'...y'know, don't get me wrong, I'm not sayin' that I could sit in 'ere and write a thesis on 'ow to cut a joint out, but I've seen people who've cut joints out, y'know chaps who work for us, and I can say 'ow I could cut them out, and somebody could probably come along behind me and say 'well I taught you 30-years ago Isaac, or 20-years ago, and I never taught you...'. You know what I mean? It's not a case a cutting corners, we all see things at different...

KL: Mmm. But, but with, with y'know the sortsa buildings you're talkin' about, heritage properties, I woulda thought you're perhaps need to be much more...I mean I'm coming in as not the specialist, but you would want to be much more specific to make sure you got the right skills and everything...

IP: I mean yeah. We probably lucky....say if I take the English 'Eritage contract now, y'know we do, we've done some work recently where it's been cuttin' out an pointin' of a building.

KL: Mmm.

IP: There's no specification, through the contract anyway, but I know that the client that we're workin' for, buildin' manager and inspec....we yeah, buildin' manager at EH now, y'know, I know what 'e expects, and I know what we can provide. And it's no different to any other job. I would never go to any of our jobs and say to our chaps, y'know, 'don't cut out 35mm, we can get away with 25mm' or 'we do this'. I mean obviously we're just, we're just, we're just...you've got to do it as...me...it's because our chaps've been so well trained, and they're that used to doin' the work, that that nearly drives the job. I would hate to think an architect 'ad to come on one of our jobs, unless we'd never worked for

'em before, and ac, and actually say....I mean don't get me wrong we've 'ad it done before. We've 'ad somebody say 'oh can you cut that joint out, cos I wanna make sure it's back to the agreed depth'.

KL: Oh yeah, right.

IP: I mean a lot of it's trust. I mean it's got to be trust 'asn't it? An like I say is, if you're 'avin' to start, if you're 'avin' to start...what I'm really sayin' in a nutshell is, if you've got to 'phone the architect and say 'I don't quite understand ya specification for cuttin' out an pointin', should you really be getting' the specification in the first place?

SN: Yeah, but there's a difference between not understanding it and not...and saying there's not enough information to be able to give...

IP: Well there must be enough information because obviously people are, are givin' the price back an.. I mean I don't know. All I know is, if I've, if I've gotta query it might be over programming on the project whereby you know the architect might turn 'round and say 'we want this work to be carried out first'. And you might say

'well is there an opportunity that y'know, we don't do that and we put the scaffold up on this?'. But I don't think I've ever 'phoned an architect up yet and said 'I don't think you've enough information'. Cos the bottom line is, ya know, ya know what the bottom line is for doin' such a fundamental part f our work, which would be to cut out and...

KL: I suppose it's, it's...the issue is not so much... I spose, given your background, you're reading things in a certain way. I suppose our question is, the specification might let others in who aren't gonna do a good job. Because they haven't got your background in specialist kind of historic buildings.

IP: Yeah, ya probably right...

KL: So it's , so it's really y'know would a specification allow them in, because of the financial situation, to come in cheaply.

IP: I don't think the specification would. I think it's just the fact that an architect might y'know, might just think 'oh well'...y'know it could be a 'phone call, it could be anything, y'know,

'we're now doin' this kinda work. Y'know, we are a general builder in and around York, but we're now taken on Fred Bloggs who's worked for blah blah, who has that experience, and now we would like to be considered for doin' this...'.
KL: Mmm

IP: And what will an architect say? I mean I don't know many that'll turn 'round and say 'can you show me, can you show me a project that you've worked on before?'. They tell ya it happens.

KL: Mmm

IP: I mean don't get me wrong. We had to get an interview to get Harewood Castle. We actually 'ad to go there and justify our price that we could do it for the amount that we said. And that we'd covered all the bases. And one a the biggest, one a the biggest factors was we'd actually visited site and I'm sure I'm right in sayin' this, that y'know that we'd actually considered the speed a the cars travellin' past the site everyday, and that we would put in a traffic management system. And I think that was one a the factors that made the architect and the client sit down and think

'this is a company that's actually been to site, and thought about it', and not just, as they say, priced it off the drawing board, y'know... I'd like to say that the majority of our jobs we visit site. I mean go and 'ave a look at it. Now, I could quite easily price a job, and I'm not the fundamental, y'know, quantity surveyor at our company. I mean I tend to go out there and look at it from the practical point...y'know I could price work at Fountains Abbey and never even go to Fountains Abbey and look at it. And know exactly where it is.

KL: Mmm

IP: But I'd like to say at Firm15SM, and other companies like Firm16GB, Dominos who are no longer in existence, you know, cos I know all the chaps who work for them because, y'know, we're all in the same vintage. Y'know, that's what you do. And a day that ya don't go out to site and you don't visit the sites, and 'ave a look at 'em, no matter what the architect's wrote to ya, is the day you don't get your work.

SN: Right.

IP: I know I've gone a long way 'round to sorta answer ya question...

KL: Haha.

IP: But...I 'ave the upmost respect Kim...

KL: No, no, no it's...

IP: It's just, I mean I do I see things as a stonemason doing stonemasonry work. And it's 'ard for me not to see...y'know it's 'ard for me not to look at a job and think 'ooh. That'll be a toughy'. Or, 'ooh', y'know, don't tell the lads.

SN: Haha.

IP: You know what I mean? But you know you do, you get the odd one and ya think 'pew. That'll test our resolve to do this, and...'. Even if it's just something as, what might seem as insignificant, as y'know, you get clients that think that all st... This is one a my classics. You get clients that think that all stones y'know, no matter wh...who's supplyin' them, are all chopped up, and they all lie at the back of B&Q. Or, y'know, whatever local builder's merchants you've got. Y'know, when you say to them 'do you realise that the stone supply might be upwards of 8 weeks?'. They all, they all look at you in bewilderment, as if to say

'what you can't just get a natural product that's been in the ground for a million years, and just pick it out tomorrow? The sizes that you've...'. Y'know, and it's one a those, y'know, they sit down and say

'we want you on there on the 1st of April. And you say

'well I'm sorry, but unless we can get on site, and measure the stone, and set the chain of...'. And it's little things like that. And ya think

'Well', y'know, 'surely you know that'. But some people don't. Some people do just think that things... Oh don't start me, you've started me off now 'aven't ya? Hahaha. I'm gonna sit 'ere now and get frustrated. No, I'm not frustrated at all. But, yeah, I mean yeah, I should probably see it from your point of view. I think there's enough information. I see enough specifications that I know I could tell you now, if you gave me 5 specifications from architects, I could tell you who's wrote which one.

KL: Mmm.

SN: And which architects do you kinda tend to work with?

IP: Ooh...we work with a lot a York architects...

SN: Uh huh

IP: Arnold Levy, Villers...these are...you know I'm not sayin' that we worked for them recently, because, you know we work for them every week, but these are people off the top a my head...err Villers, Arnold Levy. We used to work for Paul Ruddy's that then became

SN: Evans Clark...

IP: ...Evans Clark... and then Matt Bacon moved on from there, who's a senior partner, so it's now Bacon and Chand, we do work for them, err English 'Eritage I've said, and there's a couple of project managers there who we do stuff that they raise, and projects that they'll err administer.

SN: Do you do work for non conservation architects?

IP: Yes, som...yeah sometimes. Sometimes, but it's amazing 'ow many architects practice actually 'ave somebody who's, who will 'ave a specialism as ancient monuments. Y'know what I mean? Within a practice.

KL: Mmm.

IP: I mean you could say that somebody like Evans Clark would do every kind of aspect of, or architecture, but they'll y'know, Ryan Dodd used to specialise in, y'know, 'e still does, y'know. I mean in, in, in the historic side. The church work, as does Matt, as does ya know...y'know, I've done projects for Andrew, Andrew Gillingham down at Brodsworth Hall. It's just, y'know, again, y'know what ever comes on your drawing board. Y'know, if you want to price it y'know, so they can all, they all touch on it. I mean we tend to deal with ar...we deal with for general, y'know for general err general buildin'...when I say clients, we do subcontract work for people like Interserve, y'know for ConstructU, for the...y'know... And obviously they all just 'ave architects within vo...y'know, obviously givin' them and administerin' their work, and they'll probably just, y'know whether they'll look us up on the internet or the fact that we 'ave contacts there and they'll contact us... So, I'm tryin' to think...I mean I'm giving you a, I'm givin' you a heavily Yorkshire bias here...I'm just tryin' to think, Spencer and Dower in the northeast, Napier...is it Napier... I'm tryin' to give you some a the northeast architects that we use. So yeah, I mean there's a...I could list...if I sat an thought about it long an 'ard enough I could list...but yeah, we do a...there's a fair cross-section of architects that we use.

SN: OK.

IP: Or use us should I say.

SN: OK. And do you find there's ever a difference in the specification between conservation and non conservation architects? Like if you are working for ConstructU for example.

IP: No, not really. Just, just tend to be that y'know...could be more more of a verbal specification. It tends to be, y'know, a very straightforward, y'know, there's that lump of stone, or there's them lumps of stone, and they need to be there. They might not even be historic. Y'know what I mean? But it could be that, y'know...we're involved with a rather large project for ConstructU down in Nottingham, and it was all granite benches that ad come in from China an Portugal an...you name it everywhere.

SN: Oh, so it was masonry but not historic masonry.

IP: Yeah.

SN: OH, I see.

IP: So, y'know, you tend to deal with engineers. Y'know...the bigger company it tends not to be...the architect'll 'ave a global overview of everythin' but then it could be, y'know, Simon's dealin' with all the, y'know all that side, an 'e...it's quite astounding. It's quite astoundin', the level of....I've gotta watch what I say, of naivety that's sometimes borne out within some a these companies, y'know. You 'ave to go down there an, y'know, they love to tell you 'oh so you're the expert, y'know, so you've got all the answers'. An some of it's just common sense an...y'know when you say to 'em that...you know when they tell you that the work...y'know they think it's great to tell you that they're workin' to tolerances of y'know plus or minus 1 or 2 mil, and you think

'oh that's g, that's super. Oh we're workin' on a real high quality job 'ere if we're workin' to them tolerances', and then you say to them 'oh yeah where's the stone benches comin' in from'?

'Oh they're comin' in from China'. And they're half way 'round the world now in a big tanker. And you say

'ave you checked them before they went in the tanker at the other end?' y'know, 15,000 miles away.

'No why would we do that?'

'Well you're askin' us to fix 'em at, y'know, 1 or 2 mil tolerance'. Y'know, so if the stones aren't right y'know there's only so, there's only so far... Only to be told

'no. Nobody's checked them'. And then, y'know, we unpack them out of crates and find that they're y'know out of square by 15, 13 mil, whatever it is, an, an again y'know that's then deemed to be your fault...cos you've inherited the project. So, I mean you just, you get that. Y'know, none of us are perfect. We all make mistakes. But sometimes you think some a the mistakes could be quite easily ironed out.

SN: Uh huh

IP: So yeah, I mean, that's our expertise y'know, our expertise is in and around stone, so...that's hopefully what we get to, to look at. But it doesn't mean that we can't do other things, it just means that y'know, we're all horses for courses aren't we? We all try and stick to what we know best, an, an hopefully that'll serve us well.

SN: Is that enough (to KL)?

KL: Did you want to ask anything about the materials?

SN: Oh yeah...we have asked a bit about erm materials, and where people are kind of sourcing things from. And erm, yeah, I wondered what your materials supply was like, and how you sourced things like lime and stone, and stone slates, you mentioned stone slates earlier...

IP: Yeah, I mean obviously we build up a, a clientele of subcontractors and, and suppliers doin' what we do. I mean obviously the specification, we've already discussed is down to others. Y'know, sometimes it's generally y'know one of 3 limestones that will make a match to this. Y'know sometimes with ridiculous y'know comments like y'know we've matched the stone err local...well not...we've mat, we've matched this stone and it's comin' from Hampshire. An you think 'well how local's Hampshire to y'know North York Moors, but...'. Y'know you source them. What tends to frighten them off is when ya, y'know you, there's, there is a certain southern bias y'know when they want 3 and a half thousand pound a cube. That suddenly decides 'em that they'll use the stone that's just around the corner, that might not be as strong as the stuff from Hampshire, but is about a third a the price. So...y'know sometime finance dictates, but...

SN: Mmm.

IP: Yeah, we 'ave a build up. Y'know, we're in the north of England so there's only a limited amount a suppliers a stone that we can use. Stone slates again, y'know, sometimes we rely on our subcontractors. Y'know, they've got the experience...we just tap into that. It's literally a...y'know, you've just gotta tap into the people who know an...

SN: You mean your roofing subcontractor?

IP: Roofing subcontractor, yeah.

SN: Right OK.

IP: So if they're after stone slates y'know they'll know where to get them, y'know they'll know which Welsh quarry is still in existence, that 'asn't been shut down because it's just lost the contract to a Chinese...y'know slate importer from, from, obviously from China, so I mean you're always up against, you're always up against things like that...

SN: Mmm.

IP: ...constantly up against, y'know...and going back to what you were sayin' about specification. I remember we...another one, I'm gonna name drop another one for ya...the headland. The stone wall, the medieval stone wall at the headland in Hartlepool...

KL: Hartlepool...

IP: Y'know. The locals were up in arms because they'd used some imported, y'know, Chinese inch and a half inch pavin' slabs, flags. And they, y'know they couldn't believe that they 'and't been sourced locally from the stone quarry.

KL: Right.

IP: But again. It's all down to finance, as ya know. If you're payin', if you're payin £15 a square metre as opposed to £150 a square metre, and ya local council's got its back against the wall cos nobody's payin' their council tax...what do you do?

KL: Mmm. Was that a job that you did? Or just heard about?

IP: Yeah, no, we do, we do the work on the stone work there.

KL: So that's for the council then? That's a council one?

IP: It's for PD Tees Port. So, yeah. Now work that one out. One side a the wall's their responsibility, the other side the wall's the council's responsibility.

KL: Oh right.

IP: So there's a baby that needs sortin' out, yeah.

SN: PD Tees Port?

IP: PD Tees Port

SN: So that's a company...

IP: It is yeah...

SN: ...dock...

IP: I could actually...I won't bore you with the details, but I asked the chap who, our client there, who's a engineer, how did the name PD Tees Port, 'ow was that.... I won't bore you. But anyway, it was just to say, it was just.... An off load from somebody who owned the shippin'...

KL Oh right.

IP: Y'know distribution, 50 years ago. Anyway it's... But they're responsible for the free flow of err ships, ferries whatever, in and out of PD Tees...

SN: So that involved keeping the stone on the seaside in place?!

IP: It is, yeah. Cuttin' out, pointin', replacin'...

SN: Yeah.

IP: An it's all down again....I mean everything's down to finance. Y'know the groins 'ave all eroded.

SN: Oh right.

IP: Y'know at one time Hartlepool was the second busiest port from London, y'know...

KL: Mmm.

SN: Really?

IP: In y'know, 19 whatever...let's say the turn a the 19th...y'know...

SN: 20th century

IP: Yeah. And then we err...and then on the other side it's the council's responsibility, so we have a certain height that we go to...

SN: Mmm

IP: And if we do work on the other side then our client as to go to 'is friend at the council to say 'can you pay for the work that Firm15SM are doin' on this side a the wall?'. To which he'll either say

'yes' or 'no. And whatever they've done, y'know, tell 'em to do no more', so... But obviously it's erodin' every year. There's pieces of masonry fallin'.

SN: Yeah.

IP: Y'know, the north sea, y'know...

KL: Mmm

SN: And what's it...is it granite? It's not granite...

IP: No it's limestone.

SN: Limestone. Right. And so what...kinda how are you fixin' it? Are you fixin' it with like a ceme, a lime based mortar or a cement based mortar?

IP: Yeah it tends to be lime based. Err, we set off at lime based, only in as much as certain areas that aren't as affected by...there's a slight beach there...

SN: Right

IP: ...believe it or not. That gets quite well frequented in summer...

KL: Does it?

IP: We found to our err detriment, yeah...

SN: ...vast surprise...

IP: Askin' people to move their deck chairs, to move there err...oh it didn't go down well. So it's just there near St Hilda's on the headland.

SN: Right OK.

IP: It's little bea, like I say, it's got its own folklore an what 'ave ya, but err yeah as an where it doesn't touch we can get away with lime, y'know, hydraulic lime. But where we come up against the sea defenses, we've just found that, y'know, the hydraulic lime just...it does well to last a year. We've actually gone back and replaced stuff that we've put in with all good intention of it lastin', but it just, it just, it just can't compete against the sea. And when you've got, y'know, 'oweever many high swells...when you've got 4 metre high swells y'know what I mean, in the middle of...

KL: Yeah.

IP: ...in the middle of winter, you know you can come back and, obviously as a client they don't wanna be payin' for things repeat, repeat, repeat, so... Common sense approach, so we tend to use y'know, a quite weak, cement mortar. But it, y'know, at least it lasts in there fore 3 or 4-years. And there not 'aving to pay.... And there's buttresses as well which are there. And it's 'ad, it's 'ad concrete pours, it's got abutments made of concrete, where people've just introduced things because if not obviously y'know the wall... I know there is a project at the moment err that I think is, I don't know when it's gonna come to fruition, but there is plans to put an extra sea defense, another wall I think in front of this one...

KL: Oh right

IP: ...to hopefully protect this, so... And I think that's really been brought around by the locals, sayin' 'well, if somethin's not done...'. Obviously they're conscious with no wall there, the next barriers the front of their...

SN: House

IP: ...houses. So...I mean I think I'd be quite...

SN: Yeah.

IP: So yeah, so y'know, sourcin' of materials we leave that again down to...

SN: But you tend to use quite local...subcontractors and local suppliers...

IP: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, certainly, I mean and y'know, don't get me wrong, y'know architects cover most a the bases.

Y'know, they'll say, y'know, it's gotta be hydraulic lime, y'know use Bleaclow y'know, St Astier, Tasula, y'know, wherever it is. And then y'know, they probably say, they probably tell ya to use y'know the sa, the same 3 or 4 hydraulic limes, an where ya can get them from. I mean y'know they're very helpful, don't get me wrong... I mean all the information's there, but they probably know that you know Firm15SM always use St Astier, which we do, and we get from a local supplier in West Yorkshire, by y'know, the ton load.

SN: Right.

IP: Y'know. A decent rate, but it's.... Could certainly use a lot more cement! Hahaha it's far cheaper. But y'know you do what you need to do, an our chaps are au fait with 'ow to mix it, and 'ow to use it. I mean they've y'know like I say, it's gotta be a common sense approach, y'know sometimes, we get asked to y'know introduce hydraulic lime where...y'know sometimes in my opinion...I probably wouldn't waste the time an energy y'know. Y'know you, there's a better...there's sometimes y'know cement is the answer. I think, I think I can speak from experience in as much as you know ancient monuments and the Ministry of Works going back y'know 50 or 60 years, 70 years maybe longer... Some a the ancient monuments, y'know I think there was a heavy handed approach when it came to cement...

SN: Mmm

IP: ...y'know 1:2 mixes aren't good for anybody, y'know... Unless y'know it's deemed that 1:2 is the answer, y'know... Like I say, I'm sure there's somewhere, exposed somewhere, a sea defence that you know 1:2 would quite 'appily do a job. But y'know some places they aren't. I think, I think, I'm not sayin' that hydraulic lime's been introduced just goin' on that theory, but what I'm sayin' is hasn't helped, the cement y'know, the 1:2:6 y'know...err standard cement mix. It hasn't been helped by the fact that somebody has put it in 1:3 somewhere and you've got a big, y'know a band of cement mortar and all the stone's eroded either side, and you've got this protruding lump of mortar that just won't go anywhere for man nor beast, so... Y'know like I say it's just a common sense approach. I mean we deal wi people who, like I say, are mostly practical...

KL: Mmm.

IP: ...and they 'ave common sense, an it prevails. I mean it does prevail most a the time.

SN: Uh huh.

IP: Sometimes you need to twist people's arms, and I'm sure there's times that they say Firm15SM needs twistin', but y'know you do what you do to 'opefully produce a good job.

SN: OK. Thank you very much. Have you got anything else to ask Kim?

KL: I think that's probably everything isn't it?

SN: I think so yeah. Definitely. Is your tea cold Isaac?

IP: No, it's just nice. You're not gonna offer me a top up now?

SN: No I'm not.

IP: Oh right.

SN: Did you want one really?

IP: No I'm only joking.

SN: OK. Well thank you for coming in and telling us. I think you sound more positive than the last time I met you.

IP: Mmm. I'm not worried as to how I sounded last time.

Laughter

IP: At least that wasn't interviewed Sophie.

SN: No.

IP: Recorded should I say.

SN: It wasn't, it wasn't recorded. Maybe that's the reason.

IP: Do you think so? I don't know. You just, you know sometimes it's just, it's just sheer frustration isn't it? Y'know you feel as though you, y'know we all do the same, we all try and, to provide a service, and y'know an we've all got the same chaps. I mean you bring any contractor in 'ere, they'll all say the same, y'know. I'd never say that we're the best at everything, y'know, cos we're not, we're tryin' to do, we're tryin' to do the best we can, y'know and sometimes, I said, the jobs don't fit, but... Y'know we would, we wouldn, ya can't exist in the climate that's out there now if ya can't do what can say. I mean the old sayin' y'know we do what it says on the tin. I mean it's the old cliché, but it is isn't it? If you can't do what you're settin' out to do, then you're not gonna be in business for too long anyway, so... You just...the sad thing is, you just, you just wish there was a priority... I mean ya just, ya do. I mean I could tell ya things on the record, as I see it as a contracts manager, I can tell ya stuff I see as a stonemason, I can tell ya things I see just as an individual. Do you know what I mean? I'm saddened when I can be workin' at Jervaulx Abbey, y'know, working for a chap a mine a few years ago, when people were comin' y'know, not payin' to the...not payin' a contribution to the honesty box, and walk 'round and walk out in 2 minutes. And I think 'well...you've wasted your time. You've probably wasted your fuel to get 'ere'. And then I can see people walk 'round and spend 4-hours, sit down and 'ave a sandwich and 'ave a packed lunch, and really enjoy it and really buy into it. Now we all see things on any given day at a different...we all see things differently. Y'know what I mean? And I just hope that y'know people are given the opportunity goin' forward in the future, y'know to train in what's one a the y'know, the oldest trade, skills, whatever you wanna call it, crafts...

KL: Mmm. It must be fantastic though...y'know the places you work on and for your employees y'know...

IP: Oh it is.

KL: The kind of sites, as you say, the names roll off the tongue...it must be err very satisfying...

IP: Yeah, I say to them every week, we're not gonna pay you this week. We're just gonna pay you in pictures of what you've done, but...

KL: Haha

IP: ...it just never works Kim. It never works. But yeah I, I think we do. It's easy to get blasé, y'know to, to not rest on your laurels, but to sit back. I mean I do, you do. I mean like I say last week I forgot some a these projects, and they were projects...they weren't a week 'ere and 2 days there. They were decent projects y'know and ya do, they just go over ya mind an I'm sure when y'know I'm getting' pushed 'round in ma wheel chair, which won't be too long the way things are goin', and I will, I'll look back and I'll think 'yeah'. And I do now. Y'know I'm, I do...y'know I'm lucky that I've been involved and...I've put that on record this morning. I am lucky. In fact, the project tat we did in Scotland last week, the chap who worked with us, who's a really, really...who's a good lad, and 'e knows that. I say it to 'im all the time because 'e loves praise. And err, y'know we did a job and 'e turned to me and 'e said, 'e just said

'I've gotta be honest with you now' 'e says 'I don't really know what we're doin' 'ere'. And I say,

'well you're alright mate' I says 'because I do'. And I says 'an I was lucky that I was taught by people who knew what to do and 'ave passed that on to me'. And you know, and at that point I really sat down and thought, y'know, 'I've been a lucky chap'.

KL: Mmm

IP: '...to be able to say that to somebody else'. Y'know, now, y'know if whoever got faced with the same project, and it was only a week's project but we 'ad a, we 'ad a stiff schedule to turn it 'round in...we were away from 'ome so we didn't wanna be away any longer...

KL: Mmm.

IP: ...England were playin' Scotland at Rugby, and bein' in Scotland when y'know...England's beatin' Scotland isn't the best place to be at the best a times. And, y'know, but now Bez's done it, and 'e'll always be able to do it 'imself. Y'know, 'e might not jump in there straightaway, but at least 'e's keen, an like I say, I...you know it's the old cliché, people say 'it's nice to pass on the skills'. And it is.

SN: Mmm

IP: But it's...you can only do that if people are 'avin' the work done.

KL: Yeah. Yeah.

IP: And it's all there, an it's...ya know...a big chain, isn't there? Before that 'appens, you know what I mean? And you know, we're all influenced, y'know, if people don't 'ave money, they don't want nice fancy stone work 'round their buildin's and they don't want this. Y'know, they want, y'know they want reconstituted concrete, and they want this, and they just want a splay, where years ago we'd've 'ad some lovely enriched, great engraving, or y'know carved work.

So, I mean I can't dictate that. Y'know I ca...y'know, unless I win the lottery this weekend, and I 'ave a purpose built 'ouse with the finest stonework that you've ever seen in Christendom...

KL: Mmm

IP: Y'know, but all you can do is y'know, all we can do is keep that conveyor belt goin'. And if we 'ave the work, Firm15SM would sign up 4 apprentices next week, and I know for a fact we would. Cos I know, y'know that's what we've done in the past. But we can only do what we can do.

SN: Mmm

SN: One other thing I was gonna ask you about, you talking about erm asking people whether or not they've like marked their work in any way?

IP: Oh banker...yeah, yeah.

SN: Well no, not just that. Like lead workers used to do it, y'know you get scratches in lead work...

IP: Yeah, used to put...

SN: And we were talking to somebody, a painter and decorator on Monday and he said that he came across like erm the top of a cornice or a dado erm anyway that 'ad been signed by the previous painted and decorators, and so he then signed it as well...

IP: Mmm, I've seen that meself...

SN: ..for continuity...

IP: I mean I've 'ad properties where you take wallpaper off and somebody's signed y'know 1947, Fred and Jim, or yeah whatever.

SN: I just wondered if you ever did...

IP: Yeah, I mean we do. I mean our...funnily enough, goin' back to Jervaulx, we worked at Jervaulx, I worked there for a while for John Maloney...

SN: Uh huh

IP: John's a good personal friend a mine. And err, y'know when we were there, there was a chap came in and 'e'd actually, 'e'd got a book, and it was obviously 'is hobby, he was retired and that was his hobby as to go around and collect banker marks, and 'e 'ad a very, very, very interesting and detailed account of stonemasons that 'ad worked all over the north of England. And they'd literally worked from place to place for whoever was payin' 'alf a shackle more, y'know for layin' a yard of stone.

SN: Right.

IP: Now me bein' a stonemason, and obviously I've bankered a fair fiew bits a stone in my time, not as many in the last 10 years, but that's by the by. I've never gone along with the theory of, that, y'know, y'know you'd put...you know what I mean? You see people that say 'look there's a banker mark there' and it's on the face of a stone, and I think....and well I know you could say

'well stone was rendered in the god old days'. And there was plenty a stonework that was rendered, or y'know, limewash was applied. But, the ones that I see are y'know visible...

SN: Mmm.

IP: ...you know to the naked eye. You know I'm dubious that anybody would do that. And I know they're goin' on the old theory, that y'know they were puttin', they were put in there so people could identify, and people got paid for the stones that they 'ad. I mean yeah, that is fair enough. That is credible in my opinion, but...

SN: You'd still hide it though perhaps.

IP: You would put it somewhere where...

SN: But I was thinking more, not for like the future necessarily, but for like now. Cos it kinda shows a sense of pride...in your work?

IP: Well the camera. The camera's the greatest form of pride you can 'ave innit?

SN: I spose so. But anyone can photograph something.

IP: Well they can. But there's only one person can say I did it

SN: Well, no there's lotsa people that can say it!

KL: Hahaha.

IP: Yeah, but there's only one person who'll know. I mean I'm not splittin' 'airs wi ya, I know what you're sayin'...

SN: But you also said like it's about...

IP: ...but at the same time, would you 'ave the pride in takin' a picture of somebody else's piece a stone? And sayin' you did it?

SN: No but, but you've also said it's a lot to do with the reputation...?

IP: But would ya?

SN: ...of companies, and gettin' ongoing work, an you won't be in this business for long if you can't do what you say you can do. They were your words. I was just thinking like in 10-years time if something fails and it's got someone else's mark on it, it's not got your mark on it...do you know what I mean? It's a way of recording what you've actually done. I mean we came across that with the guy from Firm02CJ. He said

'I know how good I am, and I don't want other people takin' credit for my work'. And it would be a way of that not happening...

IP: See but I'm really sad in that one, cos I look at it. Y'know we went down the line of takin' on people 'avin', and doin' bursaries. And we did. We took on, we took on 2 chaps up in the north, an I think one was, one was a stonemason and one I think came to us an 'e was like an iron worker or somethin' like that. 'E want, 'e wasn't our trade. Stone masonry. 'E was somethin' else. An I think one a the chaps we actually took on, although I don't think 'e's with us now, I think 'e moved on. And y'know, somebody asked...somebody said to me, y'know 'would Firm15SM be interested?'. And I said

'yes'. And they said

'well what about if you train them up?'. And I says

'well I'll be honest with ya I says. Firm15SM probably won't be happy'. I said 'but me as a person' I said 'I'd 'ave no qualms in tryin' to pass on...'. For the reasons that I've just said to you before. Y'know, Firm15SM 'ave invested a lotta time in some people, y'know, and don't get me wrong, people 'ave invested a lotta time in Firm15SM, and they probably think

'well Firm15SM probably couldn't give 2 hoots about me'. Y'know and 'they probably would let me walk off into the sunset', but for all the reasons that...y'know, there's the bigger picture of reasons why, why you let that happen or why you 'ave to let that happen. But the point I was makin' was if I said to you tomorrow,

'right Sophie, I can set that internal mitre up on that stone', and I didn't tell ya for fear of you walkin' away and doin' it for somebody else, and doin' me out of a business, then to me, we're in a sad state of affairs.

SN: Uh huh

IP: Because if I can't tell you, and help you, and give you the chance to do it, then to me stonemasonry would fall down to for...as would sash windows, as would... And I'm not bothered, I mean, I'd like to think somebody wanted to take a picture of my stonework and the work that we do because it's a good example. Unfortunately, y'know, today, somebody's more likely to get their camera out and take a picture of somethin' that's goin' wrong. And that's a sad indictment of life in itself isn't it? Or something funny that they can upload on Youtube, to say 'oh look there's, there's' y'know 'a dog bitin' a person who though 'e was gonna...'. Y'know it's, it's...but I've no...if we did that, I remember 'avin' a conversation with Ian Clifford, and I could tell Ian's attitude was, y'know...I could tell Ian's attitude was it would be hard to get people to work on different sites, y'know, if somebody, if Ian's firm wanted to come across and wanted some more experience on ancient monuments, somethin' that I know that Firm16GB 'ave never really gone down the line of. They do stone work, y'know, you know what, we all know what Firm16GB do within our y'know...and similarly if we said

'look we've got a chap who's maybe been on for us for a couple a years, an 'e could do with a bit more experience doin' this'. I know Ian was of the opinion that it just wouldn't work. And I can see why it wouldn't work, but if you, if you fall at the first hurdle and don't say y'know

'well it could work...'

SN: Mm

IP: ...then y'know, Firm16GB y'know 'ave been goin' for donkeys years and do what they do. And, y'know, we've not been goin' as long, but obviously we know what we can do. And to me we're lettin' everybody down if 'e doesn't, y'know if you don't let it..and there's enough work there. There's not as much as what there was, but there's still the work there, and it can 'appen if there's a will, it can...y'know, there's a way. Is that confident? Am I really...am I comin' across as confident?

SN: You are coming across as confident.

IP: You know you've gotta...

SN: A little contradictory in some places, but...

IP: Why am I contradictory? Go on.

SN: Well you just said there was plenty of work there, for those things, but before you were saying that there wasn't enough work at all.

IP: No, what I'm sayin' is, if there is enough work there. It's like, to me, trainin', trainin' can only happen if there's an abundance of work. I'm not bein' funny, but if I prioritised and said 'right Firm15GB...'. If I went to my managing director now. Came out of 'ere and said

'I've sp...I've spoken to Sophie an Kim and they've absolutely enlightened me that trainin' is the way forward. We'll take on 8 apprentices next week'. 'E'll just look straight at a spreadsheet and say

'It's not a priority for Firm15GB'. That's just a fact. Everybody knows that doesn't it?

SN: Uh huh.

IP: But if 'ad work, an our turnover was gonna exceed what it 'ad done last year, and we've got work. And I'm sayin' to our chaps 'I need you off this job next week because I've promised you to', y'know, 'I've programme you to go to that job'. And then that job, and then one of our site supervisor's comes to me and says

'look Isaac we ust 'aven't got enough men. You told me I was gonna 'ave 6 men, I've only got 5 men'. I'll say

'well don't worry, because we've got that apprentice comin''. Because we need to keep young blood. I could tell ya now that the average age of our workforce is probably in excess of 40.

SN: Really?

KL: Is it?

IP: I've left all the, I left all the juicy bits to the end a the conversation. But...

Laughter

IP: You know what I mean? But, y'know, and that's why y'know we're takin' a chap on in a couple a weeks time who's worked for us before, I've told ya. And y'know 'e's in 'is 30s and "s gonna be one of the youngest that comes to star...

KL: Mmm.

IP: Y'know, and that's...but I mean I...y'know...I don't hope that other people... But that's just, that's just what happens isn't it? Y'know, young people want, y'know we all want everything when we're young, but y'know, if they think that the other's...that there's more money somewhere...I'm not bein' funny, but if you 'aven't got commitments, you can go to London and, and earn the...and I mean there isn't the money in London, well there isn't in masonry. But what I'm sayin' is where they think they can do it, y'know the younfer element will always think I've no commitment, it's just me, I've got me bucket a tools, I've got me y'know me carvin' chisels and away I'll go. That's, we all do that but... There's nowhere paved in gold in masonry I woulda said at the moment. Unless y'know you wanna go abroad or y'know be very selective and drop one job for the next. So, you've got to...but we've gotta 'ave, we've gotta 'ave the next generation comin' through because we're an older workforce, y'know and I think most of our lads are lookin' at retirement now, not lookin' at y'know the next million pound job they can do for Firm16SM. Probably lookin' over their shoulder thinkin' 'well yeah, in 5-years time' y'know, y'know and I've gotta make sure that there's enough people comin' through...

KL: Yeah, yeah.

IP: ...and you've gotta pass that experience on. And it's hard. Y'know, it's hard doin' that, y'know, and I do. I'm conscious that y'know I think 'oh he's of that age, and he can learn that'. But you can't even, you can't even impose to the younger element cos it's really 'ard talkin' to young people innit? Cos they just see me as an old fuddy duddy now! An I'm only 43! You know what I mean? But I can see them glazin' over, as are you two, so I'm gonna 'ave to stop talking soon...

KL: Hahaha

IP: ...is that you know you try an sit down with 'em, and I've 'ad this conversation...cos you do know as person, and I'm a people person, y'know who's worth investin' in.

KL: Mmm

IP: You think to yourself y'know, I think, I think this conversation's gonna go well with these, and you try an sit down an say to 'em y'know, 'if you get a trade behind ya', like my dad said to me, 'get a trade, and if nothin' else you've got a trade behind ya. And if you're gonna go and do other things, you can always say I'm a time-served stonemason, and I can do this. And 'opefully with a bit a trainin' I can learn this'. And, y'know, 'if you can see what ya see in me'. It's lost. It's lost on 'em. If only they knew, if only they knew what these (*hands*) could do with a bit a that and a bit a that. They'd, they'd be queuin' out the door to be stonemasons. To be carpenters. Because it's the great satisfaction of the world, is to be able to turn out a piece a work. And I'm lucky that I work with a bunch of, a bunch of men who...y'know, and women, we've 'ad women who come to work for us, y'know, who actually can look back and say y'know they've worked on some of the, some really, really good jobs.

SN: Mmm.

IP: And it's a credit to them. But like I say, I'd 'ate to think it all, all stop now. But, it's touch and go at times, it really is. Because nobody's prepared to say 'yeah, they can 'ave that work'. It's competitive, it's the tender, it's everybody wantin' somethin' for as cheap as they can. It's a vicious circle isn't it? We'll end on a down note instead of an up-note.

KL: No it's just...

SN: Mmm...we should've ended before...hahaha

KL: Well it's only that last sentence, only that last sentence.

SN: That's true yeah.

IP: But it's a real, it's a realism d'you know what I mean? It is a realism. You know, Gone...I love it when people say, oh they call it different things, y'know we're workin' in crafts, we're workin' in this. It is the, it is the school of hard knocks and bad backs. And it is, y'know, my back when I get up on a mornin' at 'alf 5 and get out a bed, and it takes me 30 seconds to straighten up. Isn't because y'know I've slept all night with my wallet in my back pocket, cos it isn't. Y'know what I mean? It's because I've lift too many big stones, y'know, and been too young, and been too keen and too eager, which isn't a fault. But when you get to the wrong side a 40...it makes ya, it gives you a couple a minutes to straighten up on a mornin'. But I mean I wouldn't change it. I'm not, y'know I'm not gettin' a violin out. Y'know what I mean? We're all in the same...but it's, but I'll, I'll never forget when I went to see Frank for me apprenticeship, and 'e said, 'e said somethin' about 'you've been to the grammar school Isaac, 'aven't you got 'o' levels?'. I said

'yeah, I've got 5 'o' levels but', I said, y'know, 'school and me are finished Frank'. And 'e said

'well. You know it'll be tough'. 'E was the only person that's ever said that to me. Because 'e only 'ad to say it once because then I knew 'ow tough it was. So if anybody'd ever said it to me again, I'd a said I've 'ad that conversation. And it is. It is a tough job. It's tough to get out a bed every mornin' at 5 o'clock an, an some of our chaps do more miles than a lorry driver to get to some a these sites. I mean they're that remote...

KL: Yeah. Yeah.

IP: We, we're that remote our pay roll can't even find 'em on a map. She looks at 'em every week, to see 'ow much travel they're getting', y'know Wray Castle, I can reel 'em all off, Wray Castle, Calder Castle, these are places that time's forgot. Nevermind y'know a 2012 road atlas. And yet, y'know, we turn up there and we do it. And it's the same, y'know, I'm not gonna get a violin out, everybody does it, we can all come in there I'm sure, y'know... Technicians for computers can say 'it's awful to get up in the...'. But it is a hard job, and I don't anybody to sit back and think

'oh it's great'. It is, it's lovely bein' sat at Jerveaulx Abbey, cuttin' out and pointin', 'avin' your radio 2 on and listenin' to Jeremy Vine. Some days it can be absolute...honestly, I've been in heaven on some a these jobs, and never wanted the day to stop. Some jobs I've been on and the minute I've got out a the van, I've wished I could've got back in it and got back to me warm bed...

SN: Mmm.

IP: It is really, y'know...it, it's 'ard. An you can't gloss it up and say it's lovely, it's crafty, it's touchy feely. It isn't, it is touchy feely, but it's a big touch and a big feel.

KL: Yeah.

IP: You know what I mean? Don't come into stonemasonry and think it's all gonna be about...Charlie used to 'ave a great expression, it's not all about, what did 'e used to say, it's not all about puttin' your smock on an doin' all this...you know what I mean?

KL: Hahaha

IP: It's all about this an makin' loadsa dust...

SN: Hmmm yeah.

IP: But it's a great profession to be in...

KL: Haha

SN: I've run out of battery Isaac.

KL: I'll stop...on again.

IP: Bu it's just because...I mean everybody should be passionate about somethin', if ya not passionate about somethin' then just don't do it.

SN: Yeah.

IP: You know what I mean? Don't do it just cos you feel as though you 'ave to. Do you know what I mean? I mean I've been to stone masonry, I've been away, I've done other things. I mean I'm lucky, I've got a father who wanted to try... 'e's 'ad more jobs than Arthur Daly, you know what I mean? 'E wanted to do everythin'. And 'e's 'ad a go and 'e's got no regrets, and sometimes I've followed 'im along. But, primarily I'm a stonemason.

KL: Mmm

IP: And I'll always be. Y'know, if you'd a said to me 'what d'you do Isaac?'. I'd tell ya I'm a stonemason. I'm a contracts manager in disguise. But I'm a stonemason, d'you know what I mean, because, don't get me wrong, managing contracts gives you a different kinda satisfaction, but it'll never be the satisfaction to say...I mean the lads've all 'ad to stop me, cos I get out trowels and I get out chisels an y'know you can't help yaself. I've got a house that's got loadsa jobs that need doin'. Don't tell my wife cos she'll say

'you should come 'ome on a weekend and do all these things that I need doin''. But, but ya do. It's, it's you gotta be passionate But you've gotta be passionate about whatever you do, because some of it's just never easy like I've said. It's...

SN: Well let's leave it there.

KL: We'll stop there.

Ian Clifford, Firm16GB. February 25th 2012

SN: So I'll introduce us...

IC: Fine.

SN: Err...it's the 5th of March 2012, Kim Loader and Sophie Norton interviewing Ian Clifford of Firm16GB...limited?

IC: Yeah.

SN: Erm...a bit about what we're doing.

IC: Yup.

SN: Erm, you know that I'm based in the archaeology department and have an interest and...in conservation studies. Kim is actually from the school of management and is interested in err small and medium sized enterprises, and how they erm interact with the supply chain...

Phone rings

IC: Sorry.

SN: That's OK.

Interruption for drinks.

SN: ...with an emphasis on the public sector. Erm, so we're working together to try and find out more about this particular sector of I suppose the small and medium sized enterprise community and the craft community. Erm, and we've started off really by asking most of our interviewees how they erm came to where they are, they are, and what their past experiences are, and kind of like their career development.

IC: OK. That's fine. Erm, so, left school, degree at university college London, based in the architecture department, but studying construction. Then 1-year out doing, what did I do...? 6-months working for Wimpy Construction, as a site trainee. And 6-months in a very bizarre job helping to try and erm restore a derelict church in the east end of London for a local missionary society, using erm unemployed kids as the local labourer, labour. Then back to college to do a masters degree. Then I worked for Higgs and Hill construction company for about 4-years, who at that time were y'know one of the medium sized, mainly in London, fairly high reputation, high end erm refurb general buildery kinda companies. So I did refurb of office blocks with them. We did one that was supposed to 'ave been the big...Philips Petroleum building off the bank at the Thames that was supposed to 'ave been the fastest office refurb y'know in the world at the time kind of thing...

SN: Really?

IC: And I, I mean I was very lucky cos I was with a hot team of, of managers, so in terms of learning a lot very quickly, erm, I think, y'know, I think did, I think I was very fortunate in terms of that experiences. I mean at the time I was hugely unusual in construction because I 'ad a degree, I mean never mind the fact that I'd got a masters as well.

SN: Mmm.

IC: Erm, I mean I can, I can still remember...cos it's one of those kind of y'know dinner party kind of memories. But, erm, when I had my final interview with Higgs and Hill, it was with their regional construction manager, who was this kinda, y'know, really hard-nosed legend in the company as I lately discovered. And I went into 'is interview room, and

didn't look at, 'e didn't look at me for about 3 or 4 minutes, and I just sat there getting increasingly nervous, and then 'e just looked up at me and 'e said 'what the bloody 'ell do you expect me to do with someone like you?'. And that was the start of my interview.

KL: Haha.

IC: So err, in the end I got on really well with 'im, and I was very lucky, so I did a couple a jobs with them, and then it all went wrong because they were going to put me on a sizable project at the erm National Gallery, which was fantastic. And y'know, obviously I still had in mind the family business stuff, that was where it was all heading... Err, they changed their minds like they do, and I ended up going on holiday for Christmas thinking I was coming back to start a year working on the National Gallery, and actually getting sent to a new build site in Watford, erm doing concrete foundations in the middle a winter. And about 3-months into that I managed to nearly chop my thumb off on a site accident as well, so I was suddenly in complete turmoil. The family business employed at that time one contracts manager, and all of a sudden he'd had a heart attack so there was a real dilemma about what to do and how the family business was gonna move forward. I suddenly didn't feel like I was particularly...erm committed to where I was, and so I moved back to York at that point. So at that stage we employed about 30 tradesmen, erm there was a guy who was the MD there was one estimator, err and there was this one guy who was a contracts manager.

Who...became ill.

SN: When was that sorry?

IC: Phhh I don't know. Sorry, if you want exact dates I would have to go and look 'em up. It was about 26, 27 years ago. Something like that.

SN: OK.

IC: So we...the firm was still based here, but a very different sort of size of operation, and different scale of thing to where we are now. And, that was where I'd been and stayed and worked. I mean actually, actually one a the first jobs I did was to go back to London to do a load a work on St Luke's in Chelsea for about 9-months that we did. But erm, for most a the time I've then been based here in Yorkshire. So I started out as a contracts manager, erm, but in those, in those terms there wasn't a lot of other admin support or anything else, so I've always done quite a lot of quantity surveying as well in terms of my role. And then, erm, as the firm developed, we've grown a bit, other people come in at different stages. Erm, I had a spell when I was joint MD, and then erm another spell when I was MD, which was leading up to when we had the management buy-out of the company, at which point I stopped being MD and took the role of special projects director. And Jeremy took the role of MD. Which is how we have been now for...is it 6 years? I'm sorry...hopeless on the dates. But whenever it was.

SN: It's quite recent.

IC: Yah. So all the way through up until the MBO we were growing a little bit, but very much sorta regional, general heritagey kind of stuff. Erm, the, the, the biggest job that we'd done prior to that was erm Studley Royal House, which we did for Paul Sykes, which was for Paul Ruddy's, which y'know lasted for about 2-years, and was for I dunno 2-million quid or something. But, and we did that in the '80s I think it was. Which was, y'know, easily the biggest single

project we've ever done. Since the MBO we've grown, developed, changed the shape of the business, so now we turnover somewhere between 15 and 20 million... Management staff of about 25 and directly employed tradesmen of about 80. So I think that's a kind of a potted history.

SN: Since the MBO, has the kind of nature of the work changed?

IC: Yeah. I mean we, we...the way we, the way we kinda perceive it is that when the national lottery got going, the, the kind of work that we were doing tended to be funded by the lottery in larger scale projects and so we felt there was a clear choice to be made about we either, we either ended up being quite a smallish regional contractor doing what we were doing in Yorkshire, or we decided that we had to chase the bigger jobs 'round the north of England, wherever they were, and change the way we operate. Now if, if, our total turnover was £3million and the HLF are giving out their money in million pound lumps, y'know, on a £2million job or whatever, we weren't gonna be acceptable and our risk was gonna be far too high so we had to grow the business, and that was how...that was really sorta what led to the change. So, much bigger jobs, and much more management, and using far more subcontractors rather than y'know most people being directly employed, as the firm's grown. And a bigger spread of work, because part of the change of the business was to do with bringing in other managers who erm had the sort of management skills that we felt we needed, but also tended to come from other sectors of the industry. So, more general refurb, or experience of more new build stuff. Things like that. So the management team now has a much wider range of, y'know, past experience and y'know different skills from other firms they've worked on than we used to have.

SN: OK.

KL: So you definitely took a decision then that you wanted to be the direct link for the funding. And actually...

IC: Well not quite the direct link, because it all has to go through the architects and designers, and then competitive tendering...

KL: Yes, yes.

IC: ...process. But it was...I mean in our view it was definitely led by the funder's size of their funding package led to a certain size of project....

KL: That you didn't want to be a smaller sub-contractor getting small chunks.

IC: No exactly right. We, we, we, we've always been a bit different because we always did employ joiners and bricklayers and stonemasons and leadworkers as the sort of 4 core trades.

KL: Yes.

IC: So it's not like we could've decided to become a specialist joinery subcontractor and stay at the same sort of size that we were, and try and just pick off the joinery packages...

KL: Mmm.

IC: ...across all these different projects. Part of the thing we've always done has been managing whole jobs, but with our team of guys as part of the mix.

KL: Yeah. OK.

IC: So to do it more effectively, we felt we had to go up a stage to make it work.

SN: And now who do you see as your main competitors?

IC: The way the world is at the moment, anybody who is on the tender list for whatever the next job is.

SN: Mmm.

IC: I mean the world is changing, because sadly, and I mean that, sadly, some of our most prestigious competitors 'ave gone out of business. So, y'know, it would've been Linford-Bridgemans. Prior to that in the northwest, they took over S & J Whiteheads when they were struggling. Erm, one of our other directors used to work for S & J Whiteheads. Erm, Bowmans, erm y'know from further south, from Stamford. They've just gone bust. We're now re-tendering for work that they won. We're working on other jobs where they've done a phase of the work, we've done another phase. Erm, it varies. Because we're spread quite a bit it does vary. So I mean, y'know, if I can say this in the nicest way. Some of the people we work for wouldn't perceive Warwicks over the road as being sufficiently competent and sufficiently specialist to do historic building work. Others of the people that we work for absolutely would and therefore we'd be y'know competing hard against them on that particular project. It, it, it isn't as clear cut as one set of direct competitors, because, because there's such a range of things that we're doing, it means that the competition is really whoever turns up, y'know, on the final tender list for that particular job.

SN: So it's a big range.

IC: Yeah.

SN: And sometimes they're specialists they're specialists in historic buildings, and sometimes not.

IC: Yeah. Yeah.

SN: OK.

KL: So you say some people would view the people across the road as competitors...

IC: Yah

KL: That they could... and others, others wouldn't.

IC: Yeah.

KL: So can you distinguish between those architects, clients, whoever..? In terms of the type of work. Can you predict who's going to come in for what sort of job? Or is it really all up for grabs?

IC: At the moment, at the moment it's, it, it is so unsettled...

KL: Mmmm

IC: ...and so ferocious that, y'know, everybody's trying to get the opportunity to price for any bit of work that's out there.

KL: But, without naming names particularly, are there particular architects then for example who you would say can recognise what you can do compared to....y'know does it come down to...

IC: Well...it's a mixture cos I mean obviously there's a whole load of pre-qualification and all the rest it, and some organisations have a much tighter criteria. Others, erm, y'know lead it in a different direction. Some, some architectural practices y'know will take the view that they are supremely competent, and they will force however rubbish the contractor is to do a good job for the client.

KL: Mmm.

IC: Therefore, as far as the client's concerned...their message to the client is, put on whoever you think's gonna be cheapest cos we'll, we'll batter 'em over the head an sort 'em out and get a good job out of it for you. And that genuinely is a stance that some a the people y'know are prepared to take. Others are much more interested in collaboration, an tryin' to work together an, y'know, partnering and all the rest of it. And therefore, y'know, one would like to think, have a slightly more enlightened view of how to make something work as a team effort, but... But there is a huge spread.

KL: Right. Mmm.

SN: And what about the sort of size of organisations that you're competing against?

IC: Well again it's huge. Because, I mean we are still regularly doing £100,000, £200,000 jobs, as well as much smaller bits and pieces. So at that end of the scale, clearly we are competing against, y'know, few guys in a van and somebody who runs the business from the kitchen table at home at night. And that is hugely difficult.

SN: Mmm.

IC: But on the other hand, erm, y'know at the other end of the scale, we are competing for the bigger jobs we're doing against, y'know, what one would perceive as being the genuinely y'know major national sort of contractors who dabble in a bit of heritage work. So, y'know, I said our turnover's sort of 15 to 20 million, well, y'know every so often we're competing against the regional office of wherever, and they, y'know they're regional turnover might be 30 million, or 50 million, or whatever. But generally speaking erm, it's just this story of a big mixture. Y'know...we're quite unusual, and I think that's what creates the mixture of competitors.

KL: Mmm.

IC: Because we're trying to do this thing about we do heritage work, we directly employ people, we do do bigger project managementy kind of jobs, we do smaller much more trade focused ones. We're into all sorts of different areas. And I think that's probably why, for us it feels like loads of different competitors, because we are, y'know, pitching into different bits of the market. Y'know, same with the geography stuff. Y'know they're aren't many other firms who, who are operating geographically across the whole a the same area that we are. Y'know, there's firms, there's firms who operate in Yorkshire, but we know they don't compete in Manchester, but there are other firms from Manchester who are real competitors over at that side a the pennines, but they don't travel into Yorkshire much.

KL: Mmm. So you, erm, working on a national basis...

IC: Regional...

KL: ...into Scotland or...

IC: No.

KL: Regional

IC: Into Scotland occasionally, north of England from time to time, but there are other regional contractors that bit further north who are both general ones and specialist ones, who are pretty competent and therefore are stiff competition. Erm, definitely the whole of Yorkshire and Lancashire, and definitely down across the whole of the north

midlands. Erm, but not further south than that. I mean we dabble with London from time to time, just cos there is loadsa money still there. And some of the architects we work for do have national clients or wealthy individuals who've got, y'know places in London and things like that. So, y'know...round and about. But most of our geography is y'know sorta Yorkshire, Lancashire, a bit further north and a bit further south.

KL: What about erm clients....? Err, it's quite difficult sometimes to know whether to talk about funding or clients really...

IC: Yeah.

KL: But, is most of your work then with the Heri, Heritage Lottery Fund, or...

IC: No.

KL: ...is there a lot of private work?

IC: No, now there's a lot of, now there's a lot of private work. I mean we, we are...our...again, our reading of the situation a few years ago was that although there was a degree of HLF funding which was fairly secure, it was much smaller cos of the Olympics.

KL: Yeah. Yes.

IC: And therefore, we couldn't rely on that as being erm y'know the major area of work. So we've, we've struggled hard to try and spread our wings that bit further and get into a bit more general commercial refurb, much more private client stuff, and erm, y'know a few other sort of wild and wonderful things that 'ave y'know cropped up 'round the edges, where we've though 'well we'll 'ave a go and see what happens'.

KL: Mmm.

IC: So at the moment our biggest project on site is actually a new build house. Private house for somebody. Which is, y'know, completely new construction. Because that's not something that, y'know, if ya like old fashioned Firm16GB knew anything about, but some a the guys we've brought in...it's absolutely where they've come from. So, one a the, y'know, one a the guy...the guy who's the assistant site manager there, y'know has done huge amounts of settin' out of reinforced concrete frame stuff, and all sorts of things like that. In 'is past life. 'E's towards retirement now, and therefore, y'know, all of a sudden 'e's absolutely back into his y'know, his forté really.

KL: Mmm. And is that something you foress carrying on once the Olympics has err has, has happened? Or head back to...

IC: I think, I don't think, I don't think we'll erm...y'know it ebbs and flows doesn't it...but I don't think we feel the need to want to draw back from anything we're tryin' to do at the moment. I think it will be a case of y'know trying to, trying to make sure we're spread far enough and secure the future 'owever we can really.

KL: Mmm. Uh huh.

SN: So 'ave you, y'know, found the past few years difficult as a company?

IC: Oh yeah. Y'know, same as everybody else. Y'know, the, the, the, the biggest hit for us was the first year, was it ahh golly, was it 2008, 2009?

SN: Yeah. I think 2008 was the crash wasn't it?

IC: Yeah. Well we lost a third of our turnover in 12 months.

KL: Blimey.

IC: That was the scale of shrinkage we had to cope with. And obviously, y'know, we had to make people redundant, change the way we did things, an, an y'know, battle our way through on that basis. So that was, that was the worst hit we had to take. We all, all the management took a 10% pay cut, or work 10% longer hours for nothing. And we kept, we had to keep that up for about 18 months. The site guys similarly all took a 10% pay cut, but with them we tried to put more of the work they were doing on to, y'know, individual prices for work. So although the heritage side isn't normally associated with piece work... y'know, so much of that....like house building y'know, it's so many pounds a thousand bricks, and the gang lays 'em and somebody goes along and counts them... Y'know normally heritage stuff is much more 'well it takes what it takes' and that's all the rest of it. But we've tried consciously to put much more of lumps of our work onto price work so that y'know the, the, the best deal we could offer with the guys was if they're prepared to work faster and work harder, they could still earn the same amount a money, or earn more. Y'know, we, we couldn't cope with a mixture from them of some takin' more hours or whatever... We had to just say 'look it's a 10% pay cut'. And on the site staff that is still in place. Erm, for the oper...for the management we were able to release something back to err to the management last summer. And at the moment, y'know, that's part of what we're havin' to do to try and keep things going.

KL: So you, you, you let some people go...

IC: Yeah.

KL: ...sort of on one occasion, and you've been steady since then?

IC: It was most, mostly...it was mostly one big wave that we had to make redundant, and that happened fairly quickly, and, and was very y'know scary and difficult to kinda manage...

KL: Uh huhu

IC: ...our way through. But we felt we needed to do it quite quickly, cos y'know, we just felt the writing was on the wall. So after that there has been a degree of ebbing and flowing, over the last couple a years there have been times when we have recruited a few more staff, but there've also been times when we've had to make a small number redundant again. And it's, it's, it's ebbed and flowed within that. But, s, so y'know, in the first phase we probably lost, I don't know, 20, 25 people in the space of a couple a months. Since then the scale of it 'as been more like, y'know, maybe as man, as man, the most it's been is 5 or 5 down y'know over a period.

KL: Uh huh. And, and are you takin' people on using different sort of contracts? Or different err..

IC: No we tend to use the same...

KL: ...the same...

IC: ...sort of approach to conditions of employment. I mean we have, I think we probably have used more labour only subcontractors, rather than offering continuous employment to people

KL: Uh huh.

IC Erm, and certainly one of things that we have done is we've directly managed other trade areas that we didn't before. What I, what I mean is. Say there was a loada ground work on a job, y'know new found...say it was part, partly a repair and partly some new foundations and an alteration or something or other. Well back in the old days we would probably've just subcontracted out doing the ground work and the concrete and the foundations stuff...

KL: Uh huh

IC: To a, to a subcontractor. Part of the way that we've fought to remain competitive is that we've probably use erm individual labour only gangs, and because other of our managers 'ave got the experience of dealing with that kind of work, rather than having it as a subcontractor, our site manager's got more involved with doing that...

KL: Mmm.

IC: ...element of the job. And so we've, y'know, we've brought more in-house in a way...

KL: Mmm.

IC: ...as a way of y'know not paying another subcontractor's profit or whatever on top of the costs, or y'know overhead or whatever...

KL: Yeah.

IC: ...on top of the costs of actually doin' that piece a work.

KL: Uh huh. U huh. Yeah.

SN: OK. Erm, I was gonna ask you a bit more about subcontracting, and the other trades and skills that you might subcontract. Cos you said you had leadworkers...

IC: Yeah. Now, we've got leadworkers, slaters and roofers, and hard metal. So copper and zinc and stainless and stuff. Erm, stonemasons, both in the workshop and on site fixing, brick layers, erm, in a way there's a distinction, in a way there's not, but definitely carpenters, as in oak work repairs and big structural timber stuff and things like that. As well as joiners, as in y'know, new manufactured stuff and fixing stuff like that. We don't erm, we don't have a joiners shop as such, though we do have a joinery manufacturing firm which is part of our little group. And, erm, the, the, the roofing is also run as a separate little company within the organisation.

SN: OK.

IC: So roofing and manufactured joinery are outside, but then the other trades are... So we 'ave a number of guys who can do erm plastering, but we don't do specialist historic fibrous...

SN: Right

IC: ...erm stuff like that or the moulded stuff. We wouldn't do big areas, but if there's a small bit of lathe and plaster or something then we do that ourselves. You know we've got probably 3 or 4 guys who can do that on smaller areas.

SN: Uh huh

IC: So we do employ quite a big spread now of the sort of general heritage trades...

SN: Mmm. But you would tend to subcontract something like fibrous.

IC: Yes.

SN: Or painting and decorating...

IC: Yep. Painting and decorating we've recently, we now employ one proper painter.

SN: Oh really?

IC: That's a bit of a new....that's a little bit of a new, y'know, see what happens. See if it's worth erm developing it. But just as a way of takin' more control on these smaller jobs. Again, it's the same thing really. Erm, if 'e's...we've employed this guy. He's got a couple a mates, if, if they can do the decorating on say one of these smaller private client jobs and make a reasonable job of it, well again that's a little bit of extra...y'know a little bit less of someone else's overhead and everythin' else that we've paid out for, and we've still got the work done.

SN: Mmm. And they other thing that I was gonna ask you that's interesting, is that you said that erm in the new build sector people tend to work on a piece rate more normally than the heritage in this company...

IC: Yeah yeah.

SN: Is that like indicative of the sector or....

IC: I don't know cos I think different firms do it in different ways, and certainly some of our guys who've worked for, in other heritagey kinda contractors have been used to having to do everything on price...

SN: Right.

IC: ...and erm y'know that's been the reality. Other's of them, y'know, nothing they do's been on price, and everything's just been a matter of y'know 'go and do it, and how long, and when you gonna get it finished', and management in that kind of way.

SN: Mmm.

IC: But the, the, the point of thing of having things on a price is obviously you've then controlled the risk.

SN: Yeah.

IC: Because, because if it's all based on, y'know ultimately, how much does it cost, y'know how much did our estimator think it was gonna cost to do that piece of work? That's based on, he believed that guy would do that in a week's worth a work. So, if we can give 'im the weeks worth a money, and it takes 'im 2-days longer, well it doesn't matter to us then. Because it's not our risk any more. I cost is gonna've been controlled. But equally, if 'e does it faster, well he gets the extra money.

SN: Mmm

IC: Well that's the kind of trade off. But then you've got all the stuff about will it be the right quality, and y'know the risk of short cuts, and all that kind of stuff. But, that's where you, y'know just try and operate within that, that area really.

SN: And so far the quality hasn't been affected?

IC: Well, y'know, I think, I think, I think, you'd have to say there are times when maybe it does a bit, but for the most part, y'know, we're managing to make it work. And I think one of the really positive things for us for the last few years is that yeah, we are still winning awards and projects are getting national recognition, and the kind of image of the firm is, is, is strong.

SN: Excellent. And that actually leads on quite well to the other thing I was gonna ask, which is about erm how you find out about tenders. And whether people tend to come to you, or you tryin' to y'know look in places...

IC: It's a bit a both. Cos, y'know, we are lucky cos we get some people who erm, erm make us aware of projects that are maybe out there. Err, so we d...there area number of internet based alert services and we do subscribe to one a those, which pulls in most of the public procurement stuff in terms of how that is all advertised. But again it is only as good as the filter's and everything else that you've got set up to spot them. But it doesn't do too badly...but erm, once they've been identified, then, in every project, it's a matter of havin' to pre-qualify to actually get on the tender list. Which is, which is, you know, a big lump of work in terms of producing the information, because the whole of public procurement at the moment is entirely individually based, so although we are erm y'know accredited on Construction Line, which is sort of, in our view, the nearest there was to this was gonna be the answer to it all. Course it hasn't been, so what, what, what that means is that for, I don't know 'ow many jobs it would be a month, I don't know... Most, even down to the smaller jobs now. Every job we do, we're gonna have to answer the same sorts of questions about y'know, how many people do you employ? What's your training policy? What's your turnover? Quality stuff. And all those kind of things. But they will all be asked in different ways that will demand a different answer. Rather than bein' able to simply say 'we are accredited with Construction Line, here's the information, give us the j...no put us on the tender list'. So there's a huge amount a time goes into getting to be pre-qualified for projects.

SN: OK

KL: And you, you haven't seen any improvements in that then recently?

IC: Nah. No.

KL: Cos I know they keep talkin' about new initiatives, but...

IC: Yeah. No. Not really at all.

KL: OK. OK. Who tends to do that work? Who tends to do, y'know, all the pre-qualification tenders?

IC: We've got, we've got...

KL: You have special...

IC: We've got 2 people in the organisation. I erm we call our marketing manager, and she has that broader sorta PR and marketing responsibility.

KL: Uh huh.

IC: She also is sufficiently aware of the sort of construction stuff of what we do. I mean she's not a technical builder in any shape or form, but she goes 'round jobs and talks to people. And is therefore able to put together the general stuff in those bids.

KL: Uh huh

IC: When we get to more specific stuff, then she would tend to ask out of the 4 or us, who are the directors, depending on what the question was, who would best have somethin' extra to say, or point 'er in the right direction, and put, put, put the information in.

KL: Uh huh

IC: Erm, she's got an assistant who works with her, and does some more of the general stuff and does other erm y'know submission things. When, when it gets to tendering and there is a quality price tender, then erm, then the

marketing manager again puts the information together, but at that stage it's, more often than not, it's part of what I do in the organisation, is help to write those bids.

KL: Uh huh

IC: And, erm, look at the programme and do that sort of stuff. I mean not for every job, but probably, I'm probably doin' now about 3 quarters of them. For those sorts of projects. And that means that when we're into the real nitty-gritty technical sort of answers, that means that the marketing manager is readin' all that, and absorbin' all that, which helps to feed back into the more general ones, and it makes sure that, y'know, what she's sayin' on the more pre-qualification ones is linked directly to what we're tryin' to do when y'know we're into more detailed stuff. So that's, that's part of my job now, is doing most a those.

KL: Mmm. And so the problem is more that it's time consuming more than it's necessarily challenging, or that you don't have...

IC: The pre-qualification one is simply a complete pain in the neck, because it's all simply to do with ticking whatever client body boxes it is, to get the chance to price the work.

KL: And who, who do you tend to go through this process for? I mean for example are you working with local authorities?

IC: Yep, and...

KL: Or bodies or...

IC: ...and of course most, y'know most local authorities have their own different system.

KL: Mmm.

IC: If we, if we were working directly for erm a health organisations, which we do from time to time, y'know we did some fabric repairs on LGI a couple a years ago, y'know that's a different one. Erm, if it's directly managed by the National Trust or something, they've got their own one. Erm, different erm other clients will have one...

KL: Mmm

IC: Even the little church PCC's now who are doin' their £250,000 job that they've got their bit of lottery or EH money for, they all want one doin'. And again it's a different form. So...y'know, again, for example, and somethin' we y'know politely suggested but a course it never got anywhere, was you would have though that if the HLF are givin' all this money out and are controllin' the sector to that degree, why they couldn't actually just support an approved contractor list to go with it, would've kinda made good sense really, but...

KL: And who did you suggest this to? Actually to the...

IC: Oh yeah, the regional HLF yeah.

KL: Regional. OK.

IC: But...

KL: And did you get any kind of response or...

IC: Well, because it's the same thing that you know that you get all the time, about y'know, restrictive erm practices and anti-competition law and all the rest of it.

KL: Mmm.

SN: So you think they've changed the sector an awful lot.

IC: The HLF?

SN: Mmm

IC: Oh yeah.

SN: We haven't had that...we haven't come across that before.

KL: No. No.

SN: I mean the HLF's been mentioned, but I spose we've never had it...but what you're is the, the scale of the projects are just so different that...

IC: Well I think it is. I think the scale...but, y'know, maybe because the economy's been through a period of boom and there's been more money around, y'know you could argue that there would have been more museums and parks and things like that would've had lumps a money spent on them. But, as, y'know, in terms of what it actually has been, it's the HLF that's provided the money to go into those museums and parks and all the rest of it, and those are the projects that y'know have been a proportion of our turnover over the years. And, y'know, they, they tend to be bigger projects cos they tend to have found the way to make the big capital spend on y'know, refurbishing whatever museum it is to a substantial degree. So y'know they all million, 2 million, 3 million or whatever it is pound jobs.

SN: Mmm. That's interesting. Erm, and a minute ago you talked about pricing of work...

IC: Yeah.

SN: And I wondered erm what the role of the specification...how you saw it?

IC: OK. Erm, I mean we get the information to put our prices in in a big variety of ways, and a big variety of levels of detail. So some...again, y'know, it's the spread y'know on some a the projects we get an awful lot of information, it's very precise, it's very detailed, and its, its very clear. Other jobs its much less erm well developed. Erm, some a the jobs, when you get a lot of information erm they don't mean it anyway. It's just somebody's computed and it just gets erm churned out. So, ahh, I guess most of the time we make a bit of a judgment call. I don't think it makes a lot a difference to the pricing, about how fiercely detailed the specification for a project is. It certainly makes a difference as to how we'd have to set our stall out to operate and run a project. I don't, I don't...what I mean is, I don't think we're sophisticated enough that as a matter of course our estimators are makin' a judgment call on 'this is highly specified, this is medium specified, this is low specification'. But if we're on the ball and we're actually successful with a job, then at the pre-start meeting we will do our damndest to understand what the client and the architect are actually expecting out of the words that they've written. So, I mean...cos, cos, y'know, everybody just...it's all there in their computers and they just zap it all out, there can be all sorts of specification clauses about y'know tolerances that are allowed on different things, and plus or minus 3mm, and plus or minus 5mm, which as I say, in pricing terms probably you just don't...you can't take that much attention to. Unless somebody really draws it to your attention that it really matters. But, but in order to avoid disaster when...if we win a job, and it's a new design team or y'know, new client or

whatever, then we will try and understand exactly what they want. And I mean usually I'm afraid it's the case of erm if we asked that question and the answer comes back

'well of course we really mean it'. Well then, then it's a bit of a drawing in of breath and a

'OK alright, we'll have to try harder here'. Too late to 'ave adjusted the price cos you're tryin' to win the job, but at, at least by identifyin' that before you start, hopefully you get stuff right first time, and it isn't that you get 2 thirds of the way through the job, and the client starts sayin' or the architect starts sayin'

'well that's not up to specification, that's not up to specification' and you know, problems ensue that way 'round.

SN: Mmm. But you don't think it affects the actual tendering stage?

IC: I don't think most contractors read it.

SN: Right.

KL: Ha.

IC: Well, well I mean have people shown you the sort of amount of information that, that we would have to deal with.

SN: No.

IC: Well do you want...shall I nip and get something just to...

SN: Yeah that would be interesting.

IC: ...just out of interest.

SN: Yeah, yeah that would be interesting.

IC: Hold on, give me a second.

Leaves room

IC: Don't worry. It's not quite as crazy as this (*paperwork*).

SN: All one specification...?

IC: That's, that's, here you are the actual specification for the works for what we're doing at Harmony Villas at the moment. So...that part is a desc, architects description of what's to be done, and 'as got some the, y'know, trade preamble stuff in about y'know, the, cleaning the joint...the prepared face is to be cleaned out with a soft bristle brush and thoroughly flushed out with clean water, avoiding unnecessary saturation and wash with formalin to sterilize the joint. All dust and loose materials must be removed working from top to bottom of the wall.

SN: Mmm.

IC: Will our estimator 'ave spotted the bit where it says about 'washed with formalin to sterilize the joint'?

KL: Mmm

IC: Maybe, maybe not. If he's sent that out as an enquiry to a subcontractor, they'll 'ave got a load a pages, they'll've then got the relevant bits here, which describe the actual work, and which erm, y'know refer back to the, the thing. But I bet you it doesn't...I'd be surprised if it actually reminds in the pricing bit about the pointing. Let's see, just quickly

look. Repointing....no. In the actual bill part it doesn't say the thing about the formalin. It just says repoint and it refers back to the specification section.

KL: Mmm.

IC: And then on this project we've then got y'know additional information in terms of all these drawings which would or wouldn't give you further information about what's to be done.

KL: Mmm.

IC: SO do you see what I mean? The chances are that most of the time, it'll've been paid some attention to, of course it will, but it's unlikely that it'll've been paid the finest of attention to.

KL: But, but something like that...I mean how confident can you be that it's going to be sufficiently comprehensive I suppose, to cover all eventualities...?

IC: From our pricing point of view?

KL: Yeah, yeah. I'm just thinking...

IC: Oh, oh, it's an unbelievable risk.

KL: Mmm

IC: Y'know...

KL: And is that something that's different according to the nature of the job, whether it's heritage or not heritage?

IC: Mmmm, I don't know. I think there's more risk in the heritage stuff because there's more uncertainty probably, and there's more scope for interpretation. But, y'know, I mean...what I, what I remember from distance past of my time at college, y'know, that, that they used to say that the initial analysis of the number of tasks it takes to build a house y'know is, you go from kind of well it's one activity 'build a house' in terms of planning and costing...

KL: Mmm

IC: Or then you maybe split it up, and if you start to think about it in a bit more detail, you maybe get to about 20, 25 activities. So you know like 'put a roof on, do some walls, do some foundations', and y'know...so OK, so you've now got 25 things to think about and identify individual timescales and costs to. But if you start to get beyond that to think 'well OK build the roof, well alright, that's got some, some joists in it, and then it's got a ceiling, and then it's got you know the roof covering', and it might've got some gutters on it and all the rest of it...

KL: Mmm

IC: You probably get to another 10 things within each of those 25, so you're now at 250 activities that you've got to think about the timing of and the costing of to get to the one price for a building a house. And y'know, in theory you could probably then go on another...,y'know...

KL: Mmm

IC: But it's the scale of, of number of activities that it takes to do something in construction is enormous because a lot of it is still based on individual, y'know, hand craft activities in the kind of work we're doin'.

SN: Mmm.

KL: So the consequence of that therefore is?

IC: Is, is is this mixture of do you price it all yourselves...

KL: Mmm

IC: Or do you try and shift the risk onto subcontractors in which case y'know it's their problem if they've under priced it.

KL: Mmm

IC: You know because you don't care. You're just gonna get them to do it for that amount a money.

KL: Mmm

IC: And, an our, I spose our niche, our kind of thing that makes us different is that we've always tried to, to, to make our way through in a balance really of the 2. Of directly employed and subcontractors.

KL: Mmm. And how much err monitoring do you do afterwards to sort of compare what it actually cost to your... price

IC: We, I mean, I mean obviously in terms of the, the overall sort of business management stuff we monitor the costs against what we get paid every month on every job. And that, and that feeds into a final y'know review. The thing that's always difficult is, that again because of the kind of work we're doing, y'know out of however, whatever the total value of this job was, normally there'll be somewhere between 5 and 10% which will be a contingency or provisional allowances for things. Well on, y'know on that bit, you don't know what you're gonna do til you've done it, so you can't manage it, so it skews all the figures out. It, cos it...never are you able to say that's what we thought we were gonna do, and we've done exactly that. It's always changed along the way. So it's, it's, it's almost impossible to compare the start position with the end position. But what you can do obviously is you can, you can compare the margin on the start position with the margin on the end position.

KL: an, and do you...I mean is there a lot of learning then going on, sort of as you build up experience of the jobs?

IC: Well that's what we, that's what we're reliant on. And that's where, y'know that's where it's, it's, it's, it's to do with the sort, if ya like, the memory of the organisation. And how clever we are at comparing and making sure that what looks like...a past job is like, and therefore we're approachin' it and pricin' it in the same kinda way.

KL: Mmm.

IC: So it is, it is a lot dependant on a mixture of the guys who do the pricing's experience, and also the extent to which within the computer system we use we have sort of constant rates, so y'know, square metre of pointing has got a figure against it. But then the judgment is 'but is it' y'know, 'is it an easy square metre' or...where it's big joints and there aren't many...

KL: Yeah

IC: 'or are there loadsa joints in it and is it gonna come out easily?'. And we're back into this thing about, y'know, does it say you're allowed to cut the joints out using an angle grinder, y'know a mechanical tool to whizz them out, or are you not allowed to because, y'know, the theory is that will damage the stone 'round it if someone who's usin' it's clumsy and cuts off line. So that will make a difference to the time, so that will adjust the cost for that item. So y'know, that's how, that's what all the judgment calls are about really.

SN: Mmm. OK. Have you (to KL) got anything else on that?

KL: No, I think that's...there was a lot of detail there. That's useful yeah.

SN: OK well I was gonna ask a little bit about erm sorta people that work in the organisation.

IC: Yeah.

SN: Erm, and firstly I was gonna ask about sort of how long people tend to stay with you...

IC: It's a big mixture. I mean when, when we a much smaller firm, before all the changes, we very much were that traditional firm where erm, y'know, lots a people stayed for loadsa years...

SN: Mmm.

IC: ...and it was still very, very long-term employees, traditional kinda thing. And that was absolutely part of the way it was.

SN: And that's only about 6-years ago?

IC: Yeah. It was changing in, in the, I would say in the sort of 4 or 5 years before that, because, because from about then onwards we did begin to, cos obviously the lottery's been on the go for sorta length of time, so we were beginning to change, and we were beginning to adapt and adjust, but, but y'know, that, that erm degree of change is fairly recent. So, since, since then, I mean we've now got a huge range of lengths of time of erm how long people've been with us. Cos, y'know, clearly the firm's got that much bigger...

SN: Mmm.

IC: ...then clearly the proportion who've been with the firm for the 10 years, 15 years, 20 years is smaller as part a the whole, because we've just, y'know we've just taken on a load more people.

SN: Mmm.

IC: But we've still do have erm y'know a significant number eho are, you know, long-term employees.

SN: Mmm.

IC: And are at, y'know, 15, 20, 25 years.

SN: Yeah.

IC: And, y'know, a number who are retiring from the company, y'know, finishing work here at 65, not somewhere else.

SN: OK. And then, when people do leave...

IC: Yeah.

SN: ...before retirement age. Is that, do you see that as a kind of a threat to the business.

KL: Well it can be yeah. Because it's, it, it...I spose we, we'd like to think we try and have the skills within the business not reliant on the individuals. But, y'know, inevitably, there are some guys who are much better at doin' a particular thing than other people are. So, part of, I spose part of, for me personally, y'know, part of my experience of the last 10-years has been very much that mixture of sadness or worry when somebody was leavin' or...y'know, cos not everybody's found they've been able to cope and there are 1 or 2 who were really good guys, but who just couldn't ha, y'know, handle the way we were tryin' to run the business and 'ave chosen to go and work somewhere else. And so, y'know it's a mixture of, kind of I spose, sadness at the ones who've left, and a feeling that has weakened something, but equally...a much greater awareness that there are more good people out there than we used to think there were, back in the olden days. And so y'know, I'm not saying y'know, you lose someone who was really good, and then oh

you just find someone immediately, but actually within what we still know how to do, and the people we've still got, and extra people comin' in we are bringin' in different skills, and y'know extra abilities and things like that that help, help keep us, y'know, keep us where we wanna be really.

SN: Mmm. OK. And erm a couple of people mentioned taking on employees from different nationalities, and I was wondering whether that was a trend...

IC: Yeah. Yah, we do a bit a that. The compagnons from France, y'know, good organisation. It certainly gives our guys the chance to see what good people from, from, y'know, in a slightly less threatening way. Cos there's always a little bit that, y'know within... Y'know 'Rory's faster than I am' or...y'know everyone's lookin' at people a bit skew, but when it's someone from abroad there's less of a threat element to it.

SN: OK.

IC: ...so it's quite, it is quite an interesting thing. It's quite a good way of, of y'know, tapping into other people's skills. I mean some of them we've found are not directly transferable, because they tend to do things in a different way, and their split about who does which activity is a bit different. So, y'know, within the sort of stonemasonry, bricklayery, general buildery kind of realm, some of the guys we've had over the years have transferred very directly into that kind of role, which is the way we do it. Others of them haven't really and have been very, y'know more at sea than they thought they would be, or we thought they would be, because of where their real skills lay wasn't in the kinda work we tended to be doing at the time. But generally speakin' yeah, I, we think they're a good thing.

SN: OK.

IC: And it's really interesting.

SN: OK. And do you...is it normally stonemasons that you take or...

IC: We've taken a couple a joiners over the years, but it does tend to be stonemasonry bricklayery types yeah.

SN: OK. And about what you just said...do you mean that the 3 teams, the bankers, the fixers and the bricklayers all kind of interchange.

IC: Well...f, f, f,...we've had a lot of the French guys who've called themselves stonemasons..

SN: Uh huh

IC: But we've only had a couple who have been what we would call banker masons...

SN: Right

IC: ...and who've had that really, I mean y'know in one case, fantastically well developed skills for a banker. But a lot of the other ones tend to be more general buildy, slightly rubble wallingy...

SN: Yeah

IC: ...y'know rebuildingy farmhouse kind of stonemasons. Rather than y'know fine joints, and in terms of understanding the sorts of heritage specs that we would have to deal with on, y'know, on some of our more demanding jobs.

SN: Mmm. So what is the balance, at the moment say, of banker masons...

IC: For us?

SN: Yeah.

IC: We've got erm half a dozen banker masons...

SN: Mmm

IC: And probably about phhh twice to 3 times that many fixery, generally bricklayer kinda types. I mean all our bricklayers can do a bit a stone fixing.

SN: Mmm.

IC: Some a them are m, are not particularly good at it, it's not what they do, but y'know, they can all do a bit.

SN: Mmm.

IC: Whereas there aren't many of our bricklayers who are fast enough to do y'know none stop, real bricklaying. They tend to be...

SN: Not many of your stonemasons?

IC: Yeah.

SN: Right. Right OK. That's interesting. So they've definitely got different skills sets haven't they, different assets.

IC: Yeah, yeah. Definitely.

SN: And the other question I was gonna ask you about people is erm, how are the, the majority of them trained?

IC: OK. They....we do do apprenticeships. So there is that level of y'know young people into the company training. Err, we run a sort of training plan every year for the firm, so we do try and do appraisals and all that sort of stuff.

SN: Uh huh

IC: It's not one of our more...shall I say, professionally well-developed aspects of what we do, but we do do it.

SN: Uh huh

IC: So, coming out of it is training, is a training plan. The danger is that it's focused 'round health and safety...

SN: Uh huh

IC: Because that's the stuff that will most immediately damage the business, if, if y'know something goes wrong and we had a guy doing something that he hadn't got the right ticket for, it's much easier to be aware of how immediately damaging to the business that would be, rather than the other stuff that we, we y'know is, is one of my little things about we need to do more of, we need to rely push forward, is the, y'know, erm skill and trade stuff...

SN: Mmm

IC: ...and this thing that is one a, I spose it's just of these things y'know you kind of muse about forever really, but y'know we employ say 10 different joiners who all do things in a slightly different way, and who do some things faster than other things, and end up with a neater job on some things than others. Surely we could find a way to get them all to learn from the fastest one and the best one for each different bit of the trade, and pull it all together so that we could improve. And we dabble a little bit in that but it's not as well developed as I...as we should, as we should be aiming to make it.

SN: Mmmm OK. And what about how they get their kind of erm, how get their first knowledge of the skills I guess. Do they go to college...do they tend to...

IC: Yah. Col...apprenticeship based at the college, and then we try and erm put them all with a sort of mentor...

SN: OK

IC: ...so while they're working. So, so whoever the apprentice is will be placed with one a the senior guys, y'know for, for it might not be the whole a the time, but y'know for sort of 6-months at a time or a year at a time, or whatever. So that there's someone who's tryin' to keep 'em under their wing and look after 'em and develop them as they go...

SN: Right OK, that's interesting, yeah.

IC: Cos, you know, we're fortunate we've got enough people, got enough people that we can do that.

SN: Yeah. No definitely. And the people that haven't necessarily erm done the apprenticeship with you, but they're still majorit...they're still apprenticeship trained but sometimes elsewhere?

IC: Yeah. That's, that's this mixture of, y'know,

'this is 'ow we do it, 'ave you done it like that?'

'No, well we do it like this'. And seein' how they have to change their approach a bit and understand about... Y'know, cos, every so often we'll get someone say who isn't, y'know who hasn't done pointing the way we would do it, or isn't used to brushin' off and different times and all that sorta stuff. So, y'know, there's, there's the extra stuff that the guys on site have to teach them to get them fit in, and to be able to do y'know, do what they need to do.

SN: OK. Erm, and then I guess the other thing that we've been askin' people about is sort of, erm, first how far they travel, but also where they tend to get their materials and other supplies from. Whether it's regional...

IC: Oooh. I don't think, I mean I...there...I just...there's so much stuff that we get involved with, and so much stuff that comes from different places.

SN: Mmm

IC: ..y'know cos of the size we are. I really don't think I could even think of a way to kind of generalize...

SN: Hahaha

IC: ...that would kinda make sense, you know what I mean?

SN: OK. That's fair enough...

IC: Y'know, we have a buyer...

SN: Uh huh

IC: Whose job it is to buy all the stuff...

SN: Right.

IC: ...for the firm. So, if it's specified as a particular thing, that's where she'll start, or if it's, y'know, equal and approved then she might have something else on her database that y'know is a a different supplier's brick that does the same thing, or whatever else it might be. Erm, stone is clearly from wherever the architect's chosen the quarry to be, or if we're involved in the choosing process. But that's, y'know, wherever the stone quarry is. Erm, y'know, timber, timber stuff, there's all the, y'know, rainforest and all that kinda rules that we, y'know, are still relevant to the kinda work we're

doing. But, in terms of, y'know, do we try and buy regionally, or do we try and do this...I, I....in theory, but y'know, there's so many different demands...

SN: Mmm

IC: ...you can't just have that a single sort of policy or something.

SN: Mmm. OK. Well I think that was about it.

KL: Yeah. Training....

SN: Yeah. I mean the only other thing, the only other thing I wondered about was framework contracts, and if you were involved with any of those, cos of your size.

IC: We tried erm the Yorkshire Regional one, we did apply for because we thought that was again gonna be, y'know, the big deal.

SN: Mmm

IC: We probably didn't make a brilliantly good job of our application. We fell foul of the financial criteria and their risk bounding, so we are on the YorBuild framework for a number of areas, but only up to a relatively small value, and erm, again because of the more specialist stuff, we would hope that we still get the chance to compete for those sorts of jobs.

KL: So have you been invited to com...for the ones that you're on the list, have you been asked to?

IC: Yeah, but never, never in...we've not, we've not been...we didn't...y'know... We ended up, erm, y'know, on the sort of up to £100,000 erm y'know, general refurb...cos there isn't a heritage...

KL: Right.

IC: ...there isn't a historic building category.

KL: Mmm.

IC: And y'know, after we've got 3, y'know, refurbishment of toilet blocks in Pickering, y'know... Once you've sent a few back you drop down the, you drop down the list. So for us it's not been a successful manoeuvre at all really, tryin' to develop that.

KL: And that was because you, you think you didn't get put into the right category, because you didn't meet the finan....turnover or something or...?

IC: Well obviously we didn't....I think it was turnover or whatever else it was.

KL: Right

IC: But we obviously didn't, didn't meet their, their risk, y'know, category for the financial stuff. So, so we only ended up in smaller categories that we'd a wanted to be.

KL: Mmm

IC: And, and the kind've work that we were bein' asked to price...

KL: Yeah

IC: ...was much more at the general buildery end...

KL: Mmm

IC: ...than anythin' else.

KL: OK, yeah.

SN: OK

KL: Yeah. I think that's covered everything I think, hasn't it?

SN: I think so, yeah

KL: Or, what about, what about the kind of motivation stuff? Is that something that you've picked up or...

SN: That's true. I mean a lot of the people that we've spoken to have err, I wouldn't say said explicitly, but erm kind of hinted that it's quite a motivating environment to work in. I just wondered what you thoughts might be on that. I mean it's harder for you because you're speaking for a lot of people...

IC: Yeah. I have, I have a, I have a view that...it is and it isn't. Because sometimes I think there is an inclination that y'know all that sort of craft stuff, and all that kind of engagement an passion an all the rest of it is quite special, and is important to people, and does genuinely make a difference to how they operate and what they do. I also think that sometimes it, it's a complete loada heriage bullshit...

SN: Hahaha

IC: ...and that actually we have other guys....and I mean y'know this is slight, y'know, just cos my past experience...but y'know, we've had stonemasons who live an sleep an breathe being stonemasons, and they're fantastically interested, and y'know they've got their own library of stone samples, and they're interested in mortar mixes, and they dabble on the web in...y'know, or are reading books about y'know English Heritage projects and all the rest of it. And we've other guys who've been at least as good who really don't care at all, and who are just fast and good, and it's how they earn they money.

SN: Right.

IC: And I think the reality is that it's that sorta mixture. I, I think there is, there is, there is a romance to it, but I also think that it's one a those things that is maybe more in the eyes of those who y'know perceive it from the outside, than necessarily the reality of the whole of the sector...

SN: ..uh huh

IC: ... than those who do it. Y'know, don't get me wrong, there are a lot of committed, interested, and all the rest of it, people. But, it's not everybody.

SN: Would you say that it's a satisfying job though?

IC: Certainly our, our guys who've come from more general construction at the management level, I think this is probably quite an interesting observation, because they do feel that heritage tends to be less vindictively confrontational and argumentative. That, that the world of general construction is more...cut throat.

SN: Right.

KL: Mmm. Interesting one, yeah.

SN: Yeah, that's interesting...

IC: Yeah, well...

SN: Well that's the first time we've heard that, so...

KL: Haha. Yeah. Well I think that covers it then.

SN: Yeah. Thank you for that...

KL: Very interesting.

SN: Really interesting.

IC: Not at all.

Gideon Pike, Firm17SM. April 18th 2012

SN: OK. So it is the 18th of April 2011...

KL: 12.

SN: 2012. Thank you.

KL: He!

SN: Sophie Norton, err Kim Loader with Gideon Pike of...

GP: Firm17SM...

SN: Firm17SM stonemas....

GP: Architectural masons.

SN: Thank you. Erm, Kim and I are working together on interviewing a number of craftspeople around Yorkshire, in lots of different kind of craft disciplines...

GP: Uh huh

SN: ...so we've interviewed stonemasons and...erm plasterers, and joiners and painters...

GP: Right.

SN: And I'm interested kind of conservation erm relates to craftsmanship, and how the 2 things, how the association works I guess.

GP: Right.

SN: And Kim is from the management school at York, and is particularly interested in how small companies interact with the public sector. So Kim's kind of erm thinking about the work, your work, in relation to the wider supply chain.

GP: Right

SN: So we're quite interested in the work that you've doen for Halifax, or Calderdale Council. Erm, we're interested in lots of things, but it's mainly the relationship between conservation and the supply chain, and then your work.

GP: Right

SN: Is that OK?

GP: It is. That's fine.

SN: OK. And it's just...the recording is just for our purposes. And we're hoping that we're gonna be able to make some conclusions about, y'know, what the craftsmanship brings to the region and how the public sector encourages it or doesn't encourage it and stuff like that.

GP: Mmm.

SN: So that's it really.

GP: Right.

SN: And because we're quite interested in how skills are sustained, and how they're passed down from generation to generation, we started off asking people erm how they came to be where they are, and how you kind of gained your skills.

GP: Right. I, I started working for my old boss....the company Firm17SM 'ad been goin' since 1927.

SN: Mmm.

GP: So I came in in 1972, which was....it'd Firm17SM and son, my old boss was the son. So he'd been runnin' the business since after the war. And then in 1972 I came in at 6, 15 I was. Clear from school, and I got a job as an apprentice for 'im, started on 'is 60th birthday. Err, and then, after, after, I did 5-years. I went down to college in Bath, did 4-years in Bath. I did 1-year in Halifax at building college, 4-years at Bath doing masonry City and Guilds. Advanced City and Guilds.

SN: Did you go to Bath and then come back to Halifax to work?

GP: Well I, I went on block release to Bath.

SN: Oh right then...

GP: So I was workin' for 'im all the time, but goin' at 9-week stages...

SN: Right.

KL: Oh right

GP: ...down to Bath. So 4-years, it was over dif...terms, y'know. 2 terms a year. 8 week terms. Bet err, yeah it was...but, what, what happened then. In 1977 'e retired because 'e'd been workin' 5-year, I'd been workin' 5-years, 'e was 65 so I got the choice of either takin' the business or out of a job, so...I carried on the business and I'm 'ere now still just about.

SN: Hm.

GP: Way things are at the moment it's not very good, but...yeah.

SN: Right OK.

GP: So that's they way I get to here now.

SN: And so when you started was it just the 2 of you?

GP: No we 'ad an older guy that was about 4 or 5 years older. 'E retired before, before I actually came outta my apprenticeship. 'E was an old letter cutter. When we started originally we were mainly monumental masons...

SN: Right

KL: Oh right

GP: So my original ground' is monumental, headstones, letterin', carvin'. So that, that's gave me ma basis, but you fou...I found that, obviously with headstones, that we were getting' fewer and fewer...as time went by more and more people gettin' cremated, less and less headstones, so what happened, I diversified it more into the restoration, conservation side a things.

SN: Uh huh.

GP: And conservation's changed...everybody 'as an opinion on conservation. Everybody 'as their own opinion of what they think...but I mean, restoration and conservation, I love to, I love to keep as much a the original, which is more conservation.

KL: Mmm

GP: But obviously keep as much of the original fabric when we're doin' repair work or, y'know conservation. We keep as much a the original fabric as we can without destroyin' any of the, y'know the main features. And then only replacin' the sections that are so badly decayed you can't do anythin' else with. So, I'm a great believer of that rather than restorin'.

SN: Yeah.

GP: Restorin'. Puttin; new pieces in to replace old pieces is not....I don't think it's the way it should go forward. So that's the way I diversified from monumental into the conservation a things.

SN: Right OK. In...so that was in...

GP: 1977. And I've gradually more and more into this side of things. So really now I'm the only firm really in this locality that does conservation masonry.

SN: Right. Erm, and do you...how many of you is there now? Is it just you, or...

GP: There's just myself and a labourer, that's all. So...I had me son workin' for me up to about 5-years ago but... 'E won't believe we're in a town full of stone, and there's no work.

SN: Ah hah. No...

GP: It's absolute...I know it sounds... But, we've buildin's all over the... The town's full of historical buildings and the amount a work that's put out for restoration... The only time it ever gets done in Calderdale is when, is if somethin's an emergency. If somethin' falls off then they address it. Until that happens, nothin's addressed.

SN: Uh huh

GP: Nothin', nothin's, nothing happens. There's no budgets. There's no rollin' programmes. There's no...I'm afraid that's 'ow it is. It's gettin'...I mean it's gotta stage now where I don't know 'ow many years now we'll be able to carry on. So I know it sounds doom an gloom, don't it...

KL: Mmm

GP: ...but that's 'ow it is. Y'know, the...we did some work down at the err parish church, and they brought in firm from York to tender it. And they bought the work, and they've gone an destroyed the 'Alifax Parish Minster. Railin's and copin's. Which really upsets me, because as I say, I've been in the job for 40 odd years now. And I've never...I wouldn't do what's happened down there, and, and they...it's been stood by and watched it done. Demolished.

KL: Did you...put in for that, that work.

GP: I did love yeah. But we didn't win it on price, but what happened...I priced...when I price, that's my problem, I always price to do a job properly.

KL: Mmm, mmm.

GP: Not to buy the job, and then slam the council for extras. I've never ever worked of the pro...on that basis.

KL: Mmm.

GP: That's the way I've always worked. What tends to happen. These companies, they buy the work, they get the job, they get in. Then say 'oh we can't do that, we can't do this, we can't do that. Oh you're gonna 'ave to 'ave this done,

that done, the extra done'. And they, and they just get 'em by the short an curlies and they fleece the job. But what really upsets me as that they don't do a job...a proper job. I've a passion for my job. Ya know what I mean?

KL: Mmm

GP: I 'ave a passion for the trade and the...y'know, I ya begin to start to lose a bit a faith really an... Because of what's 'appenin' 'round about you.

SN: So what went wrong with the coping at, at the parish church.

GP: Well they could've been....what they could've done, they could've actually cored out the centre.... They got an independent architect in, they don't use their own architects in the council, then they went out to tender to the firms they wanted to go, but they picked our brains for the specification.

SN: Did you ask for payment for that?

GP: No. You don't get payment when you're asked for advice do ya? No that doesn't happen.

KL: So they, they came to you to ask for advice to help work out what needed to be...

GP: Yeah. And I did a, I did err...told 'em what ad need doin' with the stone copin's. And a firm, a garden...friend a mine who always comes from across at erm Bacup, he did 'em work on the railings. And he, y'know 'e's a craftsman, 'e does all wrought iron work, blacksmith really...

SN: Mmmm

GP: Good at 'is job and err... What they did, they frightened 'im off with the job because 'e wasn't really capable of takin' on a big job.

SN: Right.

GP: They frightened 'im off. I mean 'e's a craftsman, and I'm a craftsman. But I'd tackled the town 'all job, so I could...a big job. I could've run that job, that wasn't a problem. I even offered our locality, we're only 'alf a mile away, and say 'you can use this as a base. You don't need to bother with cabins and...'

KL: Mmm

GP: No that wouldn't do, so they...what they've 'ad done now...instead of restoring the copings, they've taken off 2 and a ½ inches off the total height...they were like that shaped coping. About 9 inches deep, and they've taken 2 and a ½ inches off the top.

SN: What and flattened them?

GP: All the way across the top, yeah. And they had like a rounded head, with a lovely patina on and a nice shape. They've just a flat top on now and they've taken...so instead of 4 inch top, they're 9 inches wide at the top. Straightened any of it.... And so they've charged to take all the copin' tops off. So that woulda cost a lot more than was originally gonna be done.

KL: Mmm

GP: So it, it reall upsets me. Specially wi English Heritage bein' involved I think. And the co, council conservation team.

KL: So the specification presumably wasn't that detailed...in terms of...

GP: Oh if I showed ya, no if I showed you original specification, real specification said. Price for restoring length a copings, about 200 copin's. How do you put a price to that? I said 'well you'll 'ave to identify what you want us to do, because what I'll do and what somebody else'll do...'. You gotta be like for like.

KL: Mmm

SN: Mm

GP: So they said 'oh yeah, we better...'. So then they did pri...then they did itemise it. And they said give a price for so much for new copin's, so for repairin' a small, a corner repairs, up to a 1/3, over a 1/3 of a copin'. So they identified it that way, but then they decided to 'ave the tops taken off the whole lot on this 200m section.

SN: And that wasn't in the specification?

GP: Noo.

KL: So do you think that would be the firm who got it, when they got the job sayin' 'we can't do that'?

GP: We can't do what...yeah, yeah, it's gonna be better to do this, we can't do that yeah. And they've just been taken on, led along. Led along the line and...yeah...it upsets me, I don't really like to... People think it's sour grapes but it int sour grapes. I've been in this town 40 odd years and worked on... This is a firm that's come in from York, come to Halifax and they've destroyed the Halifax Minster co...boundary wall.

KL: Mmm. Who, who, whose contract was that? Who...?

GP: Mmmm

SN: I think that was the council wasn't it?

KL: The council rather than the church?

GP: It was the council yeah. Goddards yeah. Goddards from York.

SN: ...conservation. Yeah they've just, I think they've been taken over, but...

GP: Yeah they 'ave, by a buildin' company.

SN: Erm...

GP: But, as ya see...so now we've got err, the boundary wall, which really should've 'ad a faculty to any, any alteration of that, building should've 'ad a faculty. Whether they got one I don't know.

KL: Sorry, what's a faculty...?

SN: Through the diocese?

GP: Through the diocese. Shoulda been a faculty.

KL: Oh right. Mmm

GP: Which is, if you wanna put anything in a church, on a wall, plaque, anything that's altered, you've gotta go through the diocese for a faculty.

KL: Oh OK. Uh huh

GP: And I can't see there bein' a faculty granted for that.

KL: Mmm.

GP: The thing is, it's happened now, it's done. Nothin' you can do about it. No point in cryin' over spilt milk.

SN: No. I think it was probably run by the church wasn't it? The parish council?

GP: No it wasn't run by the church at all, no.

SN: Wasn't it?

GP: No, no. It was run by the council.

KL: So it was a council...

GP: Council 'ave got funding...

SN: HLF funding...

GP: Yeah, they 'ad...I don't know whether it's Heritage Lottery Fundin or...

SN: Heritage Lottery...

GP: I don't know whether it is lottery fundin'. I think they may've 'ad different types a funding.

SN: Right OK.

GP: But they've done this, and...

KL: So was it just the wall? Was it just the exterior wall rather than to the church itself?

GP: The exterior railings. Yeah, yeah.

KL: So that might be why it's the council.

GP: Yeah that's why, the boundary walls, yeah. But still, is, comes under the church...

KL: Yes, yes.

GP: Still comes under the church, y'know. I just, I just feel, y'know, when you've gotta conservation team in the council, supposedly overseein' things like this, makin' sure the job's done properly...

SN: Mmm

KL: Mmm

GP: Y'know, they got me that's 40-years experience in the town, and they rather listen to an architect that didn't even know what 'e was doin'. They employed an architect that didn't even know what, what was happenin'. I cannot believe it. And then ya, then ya lose the job and they tell them that they can't do it this way, it 'as to be done that way...

KL: Mmm

GP: ...they've chopped out. Put a new piece all the way down the...some big large copin's like rounded top. They've chopped the whole lot out the centre where the railin's went in, and put a new piece of stone all the way up the middle, 4 inches deep, 4 inches wide. Instead of leavin' it, removin' all the old iron fixin's, and then pinnin' anywhere where it was splittin'. Because it does split when they're tall copin's.

SN: Mmm.

KL: Mmm

GP: So instead a stitchin' that and then fillin' it with err a lime mortar...

KL: Mmm

GP: ...so water can't get in any further and c...crackin'. But no thy didn't, they...

KL: Well I spose that's why it's quite significant who, who erm...

SN: ...ran the contract.

KL: ...ran the contract.

GP: It does matter. It matters greatly.

KL: Because if it was the church you might say 'oh they didn't have the expertise'. But obviously if it's the council, they have got that conservation expertise.

GP: And with....what really upsets me, what I think is that English Heritage oversaw it I think.

SN: Really?

GP: And ya think to yourself, y'know, well if that's what's happening with things, 'ow long do you keep goin' with this sort of carry on?

SN: Yeah.

GP: Yeah. You lose a bit a faith really, and err... Y'know, when you, when you really are passionate about the job. That's my problem really, but...

SN: So what does your son do now?

GP: He's workin' err civil engineerin'?

SN: Is 'e?

GP: 'E's come outta the job but... There isn't work for 'im. If 'e came back tomorrow I couldn't keep 'im going.

SN: Really?

GP: Nah. No, so there isn't... There just out the amount a contracts going out, ya know. It's not a matter of there's 20 contracts and I'm, I'm losin' 'em all or... Y'know, there's on... I mean the last contracts that went out...there was that one at the, before, way before Christmas. About....September was the parish church, the minster boundary wall.

There's one gone out at Todmorden, which I did price that. A firm from Bishop Auckland's won that.

KL: Mmm. That's quite a distance isn't it?

GP: Mmm. So... Todmorden.

SN: How far do you travel then?

GP: I've travelled allover the country, but I try and keep locally now.

SN: What within like 20 miles, or 15?

GP: Yeah. 30 40 miles.

SN: Right

GP: I mean I do a lot a work in Wigan, and a lot a work in Bolton.

SN: Uh huh

GP: On the seats around the, in the town hall. But err... You shouldn't 'ave to travel. Not a company on our size.

KL: Mmm.

GP: Y'know. When there's only 2 of ya...

SN: Uh huh

GP: ...it doesn't need a lot of work to keep to of ya permanently busy on local buildin's does it?

KL: Mmm

GP: So...

KL: So when you talk about the work being available, is that taking into account sort of councils, private...

GP: Yeah. And general private work. Everythin', yeah.

KL: Everythin'.

GP: Because let's face it, private work, if somebody's got £100 in their pocket, they're gonna, they're gonna buy food.

KL: Mmm

GP: You've gotta be sensible. It's a luxury. Our type a work...you only have it done as a luxury, if ya have nothin' else to spend ya money on.

KL: Mmm

GP: Ya find that err....and that's what's happenin' really with the council, is that unless anything falls off a building, it doesn't get looked at, it doesn't get touched.

KL: Mmm.

GP: Ony time it comes into, is if it's health and safety issue, then it gets repaired.

KL: Mmm

GP: And that's the only time really. It was the chimneys at borough market, again. Somethin' fell off.

SN: Yeah.

GP: So it was brought to attention. So they 'ad to do somethin' about it, cos if they didn't they would be then liable.

KL: Mmm

GP: So they get somebody involved. And I got involved in that. We put them all right.

KL: So is that...is this something that's been happening really since 2008? Y'know, is it the recession or is it part of a longer trend?

GP: No, no, I think it's...it's just a long drag that's got worse over the years. But since 2008, I mean yeah, since all the council's 'ave y'know no budgets, everythin' but...y'know everybody's been pullin'... From 2008...I think we'd a been quiet 2-months earlier, if we 'and't 'ad the borough market chimneys.

KL: Right.

GP: We didn't feel the recession really until after that job finished.

SN: Right.

GP: But we've 'ad no orders from the council since. Because they've no money to spend.

SN: So how did you get that job? Did you tender for it?

GP: No we were brought in because of the...we worked at the, we were workin' on it and the, they really, it was difficult for them to then go out to tender.

SN: right.

GP: So we were already workin' on it, already got a scaffold there. We'd put a scaffold around it. So...

KL: Mmm...

GP: So it was just a carry on job that. But we, we gave prices and everythin' before we carried...before we did any a the work. It was all priced out, each chimney was itemised and...

SN: Was it, was over £10,000?

GP: Oh yeah.

SN: Yeah.

GP: Yeah, there was a lot a work altogether.

SN: Right

KL: So was that just the 2 of you or did you have to bring in people...?

GP: Just the 2 of us yeah.

KL: Just the 2 of you.

GP: Yeah.

KL: Uh huh

GP: But again, there isn't that much, even when you've that on... 'Ow I knew things were, it weren't getting any better that I was getting any pressures to go on other jobs whilst I was on that job. But I was on that job nearly 12 months, but there was no pressure to be on other jobs like there normally would be. I'd be 'ooh I'll 'ave to take a day 'ere, a day there, an...'.
SN: Mmm

GP: So that's, that's the way the trade's goin' at the moment. If ya speak to everybody, they're all in the same boat I think.

KL: Mmm

GP: But err...it's doom an gloom int it?

SN: It is a bit.

GP: But that's...

KL: So 'as most of your work been for councils then?

GP: We tend ta...y'know, I know people say don't get all ya eggs in one basket but, when there's only 2 of you, it's a bit difficult not to...

KL: Mmm

GP: ...and if you've got a good reputation with the local authority, y'know, they, they sorta say 'if we get anythin' stone we ring Gideon'.

KL: Mmm

GP: So that's 'ow it is, and it's always been that way so... I don't, I don't see any point in tryin' to find work further afield, when you've got local work, so I've always done that. As I say...I'm not, I'm not brilliant with the health wise at the moment, so I'm not chasin' work fur, further away. Cos I can't do with 'avin' to travel....

KL: Mmm

GP: ...too far, so...

KL: ...yes I will do (*about biscuits*)...

GP: So...

KL: So the work in Wigan and Bolton that you mentioned...is that local authorities or...

GP: That was through a civil engineerin' firm. That was private, private work. But it was through a local authority, but it was through George Cos, who are like a civil engineerin' company.

KL: Right.

GP: And they got all the work on the town centre...

KL: Right

GP: And we got the work of doin' the steel work on the Wigan...at the market cross...

KL: Oh right

GP: I built some stonewalls and things like that there. And then I did the granite seats 'round the Bolton town hall. 'Round the trees, the granite...

KL: So they're....that's new, just new stonework...

GP: Yeah that was new stone. That wasn't restoration, yeah...or conservation yeah.

KL: So, so you were subcontracting then to...

GP: Yeah, we were yeah. To, to other firms yeah.

KL: Uh huh. So that, presumably you put in for that...

GP: Oh yeah, price yeah. I mean we, we tender for everythin'.

KL: Uh huh

GP: We tender for everythin' but... Yeah, as you say, the properties now that people are workin' now for absolutely nothin'. I mean if they can come to do a job at Todmorden where it's about 14 miles that way from here, to come another 4...from Bishop Auckland, I don't know 'ow for Bishop Auckland is...how far?

SN: It's a long way isn't it?

KL: It's a bit further north than I am.

GP: In County Durham? Yeah, County Durham. So you've gotta come all that way to do a job in Todmorden that's just really a...I think it was about a £35,000 job. Total.

SN: That's not very much.

KL: Mmm.

GP: Yeah.

SN: And so you think they're just pricing it to win it to stay afloat?

GP: Well that's what they do these firms, they've gotta do. I mean imagine I'd've got 10 men.

SN: Mmm

GP: I would 'ave to keep my men goin' some 'ow. One way or another I'd 'ave to find work for them. Well I'm not in a position like that so I don't 'ave to, but I won't work for nothing. I don't see any point. If ya workin' for nothing you may as well not work at all.

SN: Mmm

KL: Mmm

GP: So that's my philosophy on life really. Because shouldn't be sellin' my skills for nothin', ya know. I've gone....I think it's poor.

SN: Definitely.

GP: The problem is you don't get like for like. These companies are bringin' in, y'know I mean they did some work at erm, at the pointin' work I've seen they've done, it looks like they've done it with a catapult, y'know.

Laughter

GP: From a big hill! So it's just, it's just people...they don't 'ave the same sort of care. I'm, I'm...that's why I've not got it into a big...I've not developed the business into a big, big business...

SN: Mmm

GP: ...because I like to work on every job. I like to oversee it. I like to make sure I'm there at the start of it and I'm there at the finish of it. There's nothin' that goes through my books, that I invoice, that I 'aven't worked on.

KL: Mmm

GP: But that's my philosophy. It's not what everybody wants, but that's the way I work. So I think anybody that comes to me, they know they're gonna get...problem is then, you get to the stage then, where people just come to you because they want, they don't want Firm17SM, they want me to do the job.

KL: Mmm

GP: And there's only a limit 'ow much you can do yaself.

SN: Yeah.

GP: But, but that isn't comin' into play now!

SN: Ha.

GP: As things are at the moment.

SN: What about like longevity of the work. Do you think like...the stonework that's done at the minster will that last as long as what you would've done?

GP: Well it won't because no because...and well the thing is as well, you've lost you've lost your heritage 'aven't ya? You've lost that original fact.

SN: Yeah.

GP: That's gone.

SN: Yeah.

GP: Y'know, the whole railings are now 2 and a ½ inches lower, the whole thing's... But the problem is you've got these copin's at the other side a the gate that 'ave no railin's on that are original. So you can stand at look at the entrance...

KL: Oh you've still got that, right.

GP: You can look at that, and then look at that and think 'that isn't right'. Y'know. But 'istory's gone. That history's gone. Y'know. And that to me really, really tears me apart really. And ya think 'oh'.

SN: yeah.

GP: It's not about money. It's nothin' to do wi money y'know. It's all about doin' the job properly in my, in my...the way I see things.

SN: Yeah. And is that the way you were taught?

GP: That's the way I was taught yeah. I was always taught to do..my old boss, he was a stickler. I mean if you went home on a night whistling, you hadn't worked hard enough.

KL: Hahaha!

GP: Seriously. I mean, no, I never swore, 'e was, I mean 'e was a local preacher, 'e 'ad a...I mean 'e was...'e want a stickler, I mean 'e was only a very small guy, but 'e was a tough little nut. Y'know, and 'e really made...the generation of today don't...different generation, totally different. Their, their philosophy for work... Mind you... If... I don't know. I might be wrong.

KL: Mmm.

GP: Don't think they 'ave the same.... I'm not sayin' I think that was right. I don't think it was right. You know what I mean? You'd trap ya 'and and go 'ooh! You 'aven't got any blood on the stone 'ave you?. Y'know, instead a sayin' is ya 'and alright? That was 'is, that was 'is way.

KL: Mmm. Mmmm.

SN: Hard guy.

GP: That's how it was yeah. I mean you were in a tough business really.

SN: Mmm I was gonna ask somethin' then. I can't remember what it was...

KL: It's gone.

SN: Yeah it's gone. It'll come back to me. Oh yeah. So, do you think erm being local and working in a local area, do you think that maybe makes you take more care than if you were like parachuting in from a different place?

GP: Noo. I think that's just because m...it's just me.

SN: It's just you.

GP: It's the way I am. I've always been that way, and a bit perfectionist really. And I don't think it pays to be perfectionist... I coulda made a lot more money and 'ad a totally different life, but I chose to do what I do because I enjoy it, and that's the way I think it should be done. I try and keep the craft.

SN: Uh huh

GP: But I mean, when we were in monumental mason, monumental masons only., I used to be like the votin' delegate for the national association of master masons for the northeast region. Used to go to a lot a meetin's in London. But what 'appened wi that. They started getting' grave diggers in, were doin'...this is goin' back 30-odd years ago...they brought grave diggers in that were doin' headstones, then they got, and then the got the funeral directors in were doin' the memorials...

KL: Uh huh

GP: So it's like a butcher doin' bakin'...

SN: Mmm

KL: Right, yes.

GP: Y'know, and it int, it int...didn't work. And I didn't like that, so I thought 'well I'd rather keep the craft'. So that's why I diversified into the side a conservation side a things.

SN: Right.

GP: And I get a lot a pleasure out of it as well. Especially if you can recreate somethin' that looks, y'know...try and keep, y'know, as I say, chop away as little as possible of the original fabric, y'know, so ya can keep the original.

KL: Mmm. Uh huh

SN: And like, where did you get that attitude...did you get it from your...

GP: I don't know, I think I've always 'ad it. Y'know...

SN; You never went to any conservation training or...

GP: No I never 'ad conservation trainin'.

SN: No?

GP: No I never 'ad conservation trainin'. No, I think, I think a lotta the conservation training, it's... Y'know, I mean, I, I...we won't go on about lime mortar, but I'm not a great lover of lime mortar ya see. I know they say lime mortar, it's gotta be lime mortar, but the problem is they do, they did some work down at the Halifax Minster when it was a parish church, 11 years ago,. They pointed it all with lime mortar, now it's just turned back to sand. So now they've the problem, they've redone all this work that's just sat on a sand bed. So...y'know, this sort of lime mortar, must be lime mortars just... We use, we use a, a, a lime mortar that's actually easy point, which has different ingredients. But it sets.

SN: Right.

GP: But it's not cement in it.

SN: Right OK.

GP: That's the word in conservation. You mention the word cement...

SN: I know

GP: Ergghhh...cement!! Did you say the word? Cement? Y'know, and that's 'ow it is, but... You don't have to have cement in ya mortar, but your mortar should never be any harder than your stone. As long as the, a long as the mortar is softer than stone it's fine. But it don't wanna be too soft.

KL: Uh huh

GP: That's the problem. If you get it too soft then it just...especially 'round these areas. The frost just blows it away and your left with nothin'.

KL: Mmm. So 'ave you worked out your own...do you work out your own sort of mixtures then?

GP: I do yeah. I know the right mortars to use for the right stones. It's like when you're doin' repair work, conservation stonework, you don't put a bit of blue stone on a nice piece of buff...

KL: Mmm

GP: Y'know, you find the right stone, the right porosity, you find the right petrography, which is the grain size.

KL: Mmm.

GP: Y'know, ya find that...y'know if you've got a really hard piece of stone, then you find one that's hard to match it. The same colour, the same grain size, y'know, same type of stone. Which a lotta people 'aven't a clue about. Y'know, they...and I or...every time I go to a quarry for some stone I'm an old...see I'm old-fashioned really, because I say...it's not old-fashioned, but I say 'I want the stone in the right bed'. When I order stone I want it...the bed should always run that way, horizontally. Should never run vertically. Well now if you're buyin' st, say wallin' stone for houses now, they do it bed faced because it crops easier on the machine. It splits on its natural face easier than it does on its other way. On its natural bed, so... That's what.... And quarries don't care. They 'aven't a clue. All they wanna do is get the, the figures out at the end a the month. They just saw as much out as they can. They don't do it the right bed.

KL: Mmm

GP: See I could take ya to all sorts a buildin's where we've been brought in because the stone's been done on the wrong bed. Even they did that 'undreds of years ago. If a stone could be worked easier...don't forget they'd no saws in those days...they'd work it the easier way. But, you ended up with 'avin' the bed face, so water gets in through the joints because they're not kept up with pointing, they're never maintained buildin's. Water creeps into joints, seeps down, expends...blows...with the frost, and blows the face off.

KL: So that's the problem if it's the wrong way. It's the frost getting'...

GP: Yep, face bedded. Frost gets in and water, yeah and especially if it's not pointed or...

KL: Right.

GP: ...so you get that. That's a big problem. And one a the main problems we've got with the job, erm, with, with buildings, are metal fixings that've rusted and expanded, and, stone that's bedded the wrong way really. They're the 2 main things that we find that we're 'avin' to constantly conserve or restore.

SN: When you are trying to match your stone, where do you go? Which quarries do you go to?

GP: Well I know the stone, so as soon as I see it I know where it's from. I can...it's just err an ability of knowin' what stone, it's like knowin' your job, it's like askin' somebody who makes suits. She'll tell you what that fabric is by just lookin' at it. I can tell ya which stone....y'know, millstone grit, y'know coarse millstone grit, and it's just, it's just a knowledge ya pick up, and I think you can only pick that up really with experience.

KL: Mmm

SN: Yeah.

GP: So it's like these guys that work in quarries. They 'aven't a clue, they 'aven't a feel for it. All they wanna do is get the stone out...ya see I, I always insist if it's a nice piece of buff stone, I'm a bit of a pain to 'em really, because I say I wan it clean. Y'know if I'm wantin' some stone for a headstone, monumental, I want it clean. Clean stone without any

coal marks in it, or any beds in it. Don't want any open beds, I wan it... And that's a pain to them really, because that's...they'd rather just get the stone out quickly as possible, as much as they can get out, so... It's hard to find somebody that can actually supply you with the...but you've gotta go to different quarries because of the different stone you... Y'know, things you're restoring, and conserving.

KL: And is that left to you, or is that something that would be in the specification?

GP: No that's down to...no they 'aven't a clue. They can't specify that, no they... This is the problem. This is the problem. You've got people specifyin' things that don't know what they're doin'. So, hence...

KL: And has that always been the case, or do you think that's...

GP: It has, it has. I've always found that the case.

KL: Mmm

GP: And what I've found more and more, years ago, it was more than ever people came to you and they just picked ya brains...I mean I've 'ad me brains picked, and then they don't even include you on the tender list. Things like that, y'know, they'll... But that's just 'ow it is... I mean my wife's a lot err stronger than me. She's say's 'y'know you ought to charge. Y'know you don't sell ya information for nothin'.

KL: Mmm.

GP: So... But if that's, if that's where y'are, that's where y'are int it. I'll 'elp anybody if I can.

KL: Mmm, mmm.

GP: But err, as I say, you just... That's the way it is.

SN: Have you ever worked like directly for English Heritage?

GP: No I 'aven't no, no. Erm, no, that's sad. Because years....because where we are, we're in Halifax, we're not in York...

SN: No, I know...

GP: We're not in Bath. We're not in London. So you don't...the amount a work that goes on here is so little, you're not in contact really wi English Heritage. Like I say, the last job...the Piece Hall'll be the next job in Halifax English Heritage are involved with

SN: Yeah.

GP: The minster was the last job, which we didn't get involved with because of what happened. Erm...so there'll be, if ya think, in York, there'll be 20 jobs goin' on, all the time, that English Heritage are involved with. I Halifax we might have 2 a year. So we don't get involved with English Heritage too much, so they don't, they don't really know ya. But when I originally started about, I say originally started but when we were doin' work for local authority, we did some work at People's Park...

SN: Mmm

GP: ...and we'd done all the work on the steps, and they actually asked me to tender did the local authority for work on the balustrading, and repair some steps as well. So I priced all that, err, and then they said, 'oh ya can't do it because we 'aven't...you're not on English Heritage list'. I said

'Ya what?'. This was before we ever really 'ad anythin' to do much with English Heritage. Said 'what d'ya mean we're not on the list?'. So I rang English Heritage

'we don't have a list'. I said

'Well how can I be on a list that you don't have?'

'Well, no...'. And what it was, I wasn't known. But you don't get known if you're not in the...

KL: Yeah.

GP: ...the York area.

KL: Oh I see, right yeah.

GP: Y'know, you're not...you're....and that was when it was Richard Mil, err Richard Milton.

SN: Right OK.

GP: Well Dominic....err, I say once they get to know ya, that was great y'know. But they were frightened were the council of lettin', of givin' the job to you in case they didn't get paid because they 'adn't gone to a firm that they'd...that English 'Eritage 'ad...with it being lottery money...

KL: Right.

GP: It was when lottery started first. So things like that. So it's difficult to get involved with English 'Eritage. I mean we 'ave a lot to do with Zac Turner, but Zac's moved on now.

SN: Has 'e?

GP: Yeah. I think 'e's moved onto private sector.

SN: Right. I didn't know that.

GP: Yeah so we're again err...

SN: He's an architect isn't 'e?

GP: Yeah he's a conservation architect yeah.

SN: Right OK

GP: Zac's...y'know, 'e was very good, and 'e listened, 'e was a good listener. "E...and I'm one that always carries on, y'know, never give it a minute, but...'e listened to ya and took advice.

SN: Uh huh

GP: He took things on board, y'know, which was great, y'know. And we worked together on....we did the town hall because they did that...5-years ago they erm, we did the...no it be 6-years ago, we did the whole a the town hall. Because one lump 'ad fallen off, but in 1972 err when things were different, they'd 'ad the building cleaned, I think they'd used acid and also they'd used sand blast. So they cleaned the whole buildin', which then it's like takin' ya skin off. Ya left with, ya just left with bare flesh. The stones start to then really disintegrate, deteriorate, erode away. But it's

already eroded before, and what they'd done done they'd built all the mouldin's back up with a plastic repair, with a render, like a concrete render repair...

KL: Mmmm

GP: And they'd done faces, like 2 or 3mm thick that didn't need doin'. But they'd just charged the council. The more they did, the more they could charge ya see. Again, once they get their foot in the door, it's like an open invitation, and that's what they do these firms. And they, they faced all these walls up. They didn't key it. So what's happenin' then, the water got behind it, and these slabs of like render were droppin' off the wall. Faces, like big slithers. Y'know, that's sorta size! Off a face that was...y'know, they'd just built it up with a render. It looked lovely on the day they did it, but now it went black, since 1972, cos it weathers differently to stone. And they didn't use any fixin' back to the original fabric, so there was no, no mechanical fixin', no armature, y'know, where they did mouldin', they didn't build a wire mesh like you should do, and key it back. They just put unibond on. But the thing was, they knocked off the loose, but it was carried to deterioratin', so you're only fixin' to the, the shell.

SN: Yeah.

GP: I can show you things in the yard that we brought back from there. Absolutely...you wouldn't believe...cement bags 'ave been rolled up in a ball and put, cement them in and make them look like a fluted column.

SN: really?

GP: Yeah. An ionic capital yeah. You've never seen anythin' like it. With bits of wire, that was the only wire that was involved. But we took it off all the way 'round the buildin', and there wasn't...and I mean we're talkin' about high parts a the buildin', the town hall, and there was no mechanical fixin' of the repair work back to the original fabric.

Unbelievable.

SN: That is, isn't it?

GP: So we had to...we ended up 5-years ago takin' the whole lot off because the thing is, some fell off already that...

KL: So that was dangerous was it?

GP: Yeah, dangerous stonework. Thing was, if there was a liability claim, anything that's been...anything that's natural, I think court would 'ave a struggle to sorta say 'well y'know, there's a piece a stone fell off there, well that's an act of God'.

KL: Mmm

GP: A piece of render repair that's been done 30-years ago there 'as fallen off, somebody looks into that, they'll say 'well why is that not...?'

KL: Mmm

GP: So there would be a claim there. So I think they 'ad to we decided that we had to remove all the loose and dangerous render. Well we took the whole lot a the render repair off. It's better off and not repaired... It never got put back right. Y'know we never, we've not rebuilt...done the moulds or chopped out and put new stone in. There's no money for that.

SN: Uh huh

GP: It's a matter a really makin' it safe, and that's what all the work at the moment is. If there's any local authority work, it's not really makin' it back to its original. It's make it safe.

SN: Uh huh

GP: So that's all that goes on now.

KL: So are these companies doin' this kind of work, what you've just called general builders? Or do they say that they are...

GP: Well this is it, no they...

KL: ...conservation

GP: ...all are conservation companies. Yeah, yeah. That's the problem, they just get in ya see. Then you're gettin'...and the people that are runnin' the companies tend to not know a great deal about the job, so you get the man on site that's actually a subcontractor...

KL: Mmm

GP: ...that works y'know, 'e's 'ad is own...like the kind, the job that they did in Halifax, 'e worked for 'imself. But 'e 'adn't really...

KL: Mmm

GP: ...I watched 'im work and I thought "ow can ya?"...when you use a mallet when you're a mason, ya let the mallet do the work. You swing the mallet in ya finger, and the mallet...you don't 'old ya hand like this and go...

KL: Mmm, mmm

GP: Right? Ya let the mallet do the work. You let the swing a the mallet, the weight a the mallet hit the chisel.

SN: Uh huh

KL: Mmm.

GP: And ya know 'ow to...when you're a mason ya, you know, when you're doin' it, you know what ya doin'. 'E were goin'...y'know, *muffled* and that just, that's enough for me. I've seen enough. You don't need to be able to do the job to know. I know 'e's...

KL: Mmmm

GP: Y'know, things like that, it's silly. I know it's somethin' small and trivial, but I can interview somebody for a job, I can say 'right, work me a draft on there'. A draft is a margin, just a margin on a piece a stone. Mark a line and pitch it in first with a pitchin' tool, then go along with a chisel. And work a draft along the edge of the stone. And I can tell by watching whether they're capable of doin' the job properly or not.

KL: Mmm

SN: Yeah

KL: So I mean is there any kind of process or something that could be used to try and put this right...? Are there any kind of obvious suggestions?

GP: Put this right. I don't know! Well I'm in, see I'm a position where now I don't know whether to...I've spoke to my wife about it a lot, we've talked about it. If I, if I give up and retire, and then there's nobody... I mean I can letter cut by hand, stone letter cuttin'.

KL: Mmm

GP: I do letter cuttin' by hand. There isn't really another generation below me that can do that. Everythin' now is done on sandblasted letters. They get a computer, you get a computer, you type in like you do a letter, set your letterin' out, there's no art involved, a lotta these people are undertakers. They get a customer say 'oh yeah I want in lovin' memory of so and so, so and so'. They don't set it out as it should be set out, they just set it out 'in lovin' memory of' and the name. They just set it out, press print, and instead of printin' it does it on a cutter, a big roll of sandblast tape. And it cuts it out like that, it goes right through, you stick it on the face of the head stone, you pick out the letters and then when you sandblast, anywhere where there isn't a rubber tape sandblasts. Anywhere it's rubber it bounces back off. And that's all you do with letterin' now. You peel the lot off and that's it. So the tra...the skill's gone outta the letter cuttin'. So there, there's no real need...unless you want a headstone...if I've...but I mean there's still a lot of headstones out there 'ave been lettered by hand. I wouldn't dream of puttin' a sandblast letterin' inscription on top of a, or below a headstone that's already hand lettered.

KL: Mmm

GP: But they won't 'ave any choice in the years to come.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

GP: In 10-years time there won't be anybody there to actually do it. And I feel as though really I ought to be...with me *muffled*...as I say I've got rheumatoid arthritis now, so I'm really strugglin' with keepin' goin' really.

KL: Right.

GP: I've got osteo-arthritis in my bones with doin' it for 40-years. Y'know I really 'ave struggled because I've always been on me knees, I've always 'ad...used air tools for 12, 14 hours a day. Which you shouldn't do, as we know now.

KL: Mmm

GP: But I can't claim off anybody because I worked for meself, so it's a bit late in the day for that. But...so now, I wouldn't want to bring anybody in to use air tools, but I think people ought to be able to use the cra...y'know ought to know what the crafts about, and y'know given an opportunity. Because once that skill's gone it's gone. Y'know...

SN: Well that's it...

GP: It's really sad I think, but err...

SN: You don't feel like...

GP: I don't know whether I ought to be really...I mean it's not, it's not really a good time to be tryin' to be chasin' anybody up for sorta y'know, consultancy work as a, as an architectural mason, y'know...with English Heritage, or with local authorities. Because there's no...they're cuttin' jobs, never mind takin' people on. So it's a bad time really.

SN: Mmm

GP: But, if we don't watch it, the country's gonna have nobody...there's gonna be nobody left that can actually do the properly. Which is a sad state of affairs really int it.

SN: Yeah. Have you spoken to the colleges?

GP: I 'aven't really, y'know cos I 'aven't really 'ad the...y'know, I 'ave enough really to keep goin' work wise, and...

SN: Yeah.

GP: I'm not really...I don't...I could speak to the colleges yeah. I 'ave a friend that teaches at York, err Harrogate college...

SN: Uh huh

GP: Err, and my son went to York College.

SN: Uh huh.

GP: So I've contacts if I wanted but, I don't know whether that's the right way to go. I'm even thinkin' about 'avin'...me field up 'ere, I've got a, a building. I wondered whether makin' into a conservation skills. Wonder if there's an area for convertin' that buildin' and makin' it into a conservation skills centre or... I don't know. I don't know what to do to be honest with you. Cos I've got to the stage now, I'm 55. I don't really wanna be workin' too much longer.

SN: No.

GP: But I don't feel really that, as things are, that I could carry on physically. If work came in, so it was...the problem is you're under pressure to... To make money you've got to use air tools in masonry. If ya don't se air tools with masonry, you've no chance of bein' competitive. You've got to be able to add...you see what most a these masons are now, like those guys that worked on that job at the minster... They're doin' it all with saws.

SN: Mmm.

KL: Mmm

GP: But they're not doin' it right even there you see. They're usin'...everythin'...they didn't have a water supply down at the minster. Can you believe that? They did all this cuttin', sawin' the tops off all this, there's dust everywhere, and they didn't use any wa...they didn't even get a water supply to the job. So they've done all that dry. So they've ground in, they've sawn in with a saw, then they've chopped it off, hammered it off, then they've ground it with a grinder. Well that's not masonry.

KL: Mmm

GP: You know. That's not what masonry's about. But, on the other hand, masonry, you don't wanna be usin' air tools all day, y'know, to, to, to work things off. Because, y'know, you're only sposed to use 'em 20 minutes a day.

SN: Really?

KL: 20 minutes?

GP; A day. So it doesn't...

KL: And you're usin' them for hours.

GP: When I started, I mean I was using it 14 hours a day. Air tools, an I mean the vibration, y'know. I've 'ad both me carpel tunnels work on, y'know, operated on...

KL: Yeah.

GP: ...because y'know, I shake like I don't know what. But that's...

KL: And that's through...

GP: I think so, yeah. Air tools. I've 'ad my elbow operated on as well. There again it's wear and tear.

KL: Mmm

GP: So I wouldn't really, it's like I get lads in that work for me. I don't really want to get them...I wouldn't expect to let them work on the tools as in...I'd better really just sayin' 'yeah, let's do it the college way'. Y'know, let's do it the traditional way, like I did at college. Yeah, well y'know, and do it that way. But in the real world, to be competitive now you've gotta be able to use...they either use grinder...I call them grinder masons, or you've got to y'know just use y'know... But like, like the job at the parish chur, the minster. What really upset me was that all the repair work that was to be carried out on that, on those copin's. I'd, I'd put in my tender that I would bring them up to my workshop. I have a saw here. A 4 foot saw that cuts 18 inches deep. A big circular saw. I would've brought 'em here, and set them all on the saw. Anythin' that wanted sawin' out and choppin', I would a brought it up here and done it all with water, so you don't...health and safety issues 'ave ya? You've no dust everywhere.

SN: No.

GP: They've been brought up. I would've lifted them off onto a wagon, brought them up here, done them, and took them back and brought them back. And they'd've all been... But, mosta the repair work down there coulda been done by core drilling. Where they've got all these stubs, what they've told them down there was 'oh you can't do anythin' with these. They, these stubs, these...'. Bottom a the railin's where you got...they're leaded in. So all they wanted really was a core drill, 2 inches diameter, with piece of timber, with a hole through the timber, ply wood, because you can't...you normally need a centre to stop ya drill wanderin'.

KL: Oh right, mmm.

GP: So you get a piece of inch ply, drill a hole through it with a timber bit, the right size, and you go through with ya diamond core, you hold that board on there so it's in the right position, core down, you only go down an inch an ½ into the stone, knock that out, knock that lump a lead and iron out...

SN: Uh huh

GP: Get a slightly bigger core, right? So you get a core drill slightly bigger. Instead a 2 inches, 2 and a ¼. So that you core some new stone, and use the cores as fillers. Plugs. And then you'd a put those in there, dressed 'em off by hand, resined them in, dressed them off by hand, and you would've 'ad a finished product.

SN: Yeah.

GP: And you'd've 'ad the original.

SN: It's amazing that that wasn't cheaper as well.

GP: It was a lot cheaper, it was. That's what I'm sayin'. I just cannot understand...

SN: Obviously with all the extras and everything... It would be interesting to compare your tender to what they actually spent.

GP: Well it would be interesting but I'll never find that out. Well I could find out if I wanted, but...

SN: Do a freedom of information.

GP: Oh yeah. I'm entitled to find out if I wanted yeah. But I think that might just upset me and get me goin' more than ever.

KL: Yeah.

GP: I don't think it's worth it but... See really, that's what upsets ya, when, y'know, you know your job, I know everythin's down to money, and everythin's down to price, but when ya look at what they've done, and what they've got, and what they should've 'ad...

SN: Mmm

GP: ...in my opinion. But that's only my opinion.

SN: Well that's what we're here to find out.

GP: But I think, y'know, there's a difference between right and wrong. To me they've vandalized that. That's been deliberate vandalism. Well not deliberate, but neglect.

SN: Uh huh

KL: Uh huh

GP: Negligent.

KL: Mmm

GP: On behalf a certain people. They've been negligent in their jobs. So...paid a lotta money to make sure that job done properly, and it 'asn't been done properly. So that's really...but you can start...

SN: Yeah.... The only other question I've really got is about like architects and whether you have, whether you've worked wit any other kind of independent architects...

GP: I have yeah. I've worked with a firm at Bradford called Langtree Langtons. We did 3 or 4 altars. Langtree Langtons architects. And they were, they were really keen on y'know the design an...they were artistic. Very arty guy. Peter Langtree Langton, and 'e designed err...we did 2 altars. One at Selby...

SN: Uh huh

GP: *muffled?* at Leeds. The podium and the err tabernacle. So we did the whole lot.

SN: Right.

GP: But the err...re-orderin' the church. So I've done that sort of work which was, that's interestin'.

SN: Uh huh, yeah.

GP: Yeah, I mean we've worked...we worked with George Pickles, architect at Brighouse. He's a, a fairly renowned architect. But he's retired now really

SN: Right

GP: So, yeah, we did a lots of church work with him...

SN: Yeah

GP: And again ya got involved with English Heritage there.

SN: Yeah. Cos they fund a lotta the church work don't they?

GP: So they fund err...well not a lot 'round 'ere. They may do in York. But... That's it really. 'Round Halifax you're a poor relation really. There no 2 ways about it. It is...it's, y'know, if you're not in the centre of the, the fundin' doesn't come to... Unless you've got somethin' prestigious like the Piece Hall,...

KL: Mmm

GP: ...fundin's not available for anything else really. Of any significance.

SN: IS there no like old parish churches....I spose Halifax, it's quite a new place isn't it really? Compared to York...?

GP: No, Halifax parish church dates back to err 900.

SN: Does it?

GP: In fact there's been...yeah, it's about 1100 years, yeah. So the first church a the nor. Part a the Halifax Minster, parish church, is the actual part a the original building.

SN: Right.

GP: The back...they've used the internal wall as part a the external wall of the original buildings.

KL: Oh right.

GP: It was further to the north...

SN: Right.

GP: Further north than it is now. They've brought it this way. But the...I mean these railin's they've 'ad done, and the copin's, they're 300 years old, y'know...

SN: Mmm.

GP: Yeah, it's sad.

SN: It is. And what, what about the Piece Hall? Do you think you'll get involved with that or not?

GP: Well no I've, I've thought about offerin' my services as a, possibly err, y'know a....I'm tryin' ta think of the word...overseein' the job.

SN: Uh huh. Like a contracts manager.

GP: Not a contracts manager. No, more of a....blimey I can't think of the...

KL: More to do with the sort a quality...

GP: Yeah, clerk of works. A clerk of works really yeah.

SN: Right.

GP: That's I've wondered...whether to offer, I mean...

KL: Mmm

GP: You mean, say 'if you wanted somebody as a clerk of works, I don't mind doin' that, y'know. I'll run that job, make sure it's done properly'...

SN; Yeah.

KL: So they're doing quite a...I know there's sposed to be something happening with it, but I don't know the de...because...

GP: No, what they've done....they've got...they've about 18 million I think they can spend or something like that.

KL: But is it goin' to be on the fabric then?

GP: No, this is the problem...what they're doin'... No, we got involved with the, erm, the actual fabric of the building. It's again, face bedded, a lotta the stone.

KL: Mmm

GP: With it bein' flag rock, a lotta the stone's flag rock, and it's face bedded. So, where you've these arches, all the stone that are in...anythin' that's narrow, they've obviously got a piece of stone...they did it the...if they got a piece of stone that wide, but they wanted that size, they'd use it on its natural bed. So the get a piece a stone, a bed that thick, cut a size out they wanted, and then they walled it up the wrong way.

SN: Right.

GP: Then the only stones that are actually standin' up to the weather are the ones that are naturally bedded. That they've used as through stones, that go right through the wall.

SN: Right.

KL: OK

GP: And they're on the natural bed. So they're the only ones that are sorta standin' out as bein' solid. And the rest of it 'round it's fallin' apart, and just... But the thing what they're gonna do, they...all the money they're spending is gonna be used on the paved area in the middle.

KL: Right.

GP: They're lowerin', puttin' steps in...

SN: Uh huh

GP: Higherin' it, and getting a level platform. They're gonna have fountains, and...

KL: Mmm

SN: So they're not doin' any work on the stonework?

GP: No.

SN: Cos I know they did some....

GP: Not that I know of. Not that I know of, no. I don't think there's anythin' down for, I don't think there's anythin' down for conservation of the original fabric.

KL: How long ago was that kinda main restoration then? Cos it has...

GP: What on the Piece Hall?

KL: Yeah

GP: 197...3. Because my old boss got involved.

KL: '73. Right.

GP: About '72, '73. It was a firm err from err Winpenny's I think got involved with it, from Huddersfield. Many years ago.

SN: Right

GP: But there's not a lot done. No

KL: Right.

GP: There want a lot...I think they 'ad it cleaned...

SN: Right.

GP: ...y'know, which was a big mistake again.

KL: Mmmm. Yeah. What...just one other thing that we've discussed with one or two other people is, is the kind of uncertainty that's sometimes involved in conservation work, and emr....I, I'm thinking y'know about the example you've been telling us about the church, y'know one a the reasons perhaps they've been able to go the way it did, was by saying well they found things out once they'd started.

GP: No, well...you shouldn't be...

KL: Is that something that you've found happens a lot? You come across things...

GP: Yeah. It does 'appen a lot because there isn't enough, there isn't enough knowledge out there.

KL: Right.

GP: The people who are giving the work out 'aven't got the knowledge...

KL: Uh huh

GP: ...they'll pay, they'll for consultancy for this, that and the other, but they won't pay for specialist knowledge from... It's rather difficult when you're going out to tender yaself, when you want to be on a tender list, it's difficult then usin' you as the...doing the specification.

KL: Of course, yeah.

GP: Say...it gets a bit of a conflict of interest really there.

KL: Mmm.

GP: But, end a the day really, that might be the way forward for me. Because now, as I say, I'm not too bothered about actually doin' the physical side of things, but bein' able to help with other people...

KL: Mmm

GP: Y'know, I think I'd be good at makin' sure the jobs were done properly.

KL: Mmm, mmm

GP: I might be a bit of a stickler really, but it's, it's how it should be.

SN: Mmm.

GP: It...if it can be done it should be done.

KL: Mmm

GP: That's the way I look at it. If it can be done properly, it should be done properly. Why do a job where if it's not worth doin', don't do it at all. Or...you know, it's gotta be done well or don't bother doin' it.

KL: But do you think if the initial work in drawing up the specification, if there was a lot more effort put into that...

Phone rings

SN: Sorry

KL: ...there would be less...you would be able to anticipate a lot of the...

GP: Oh yeah, this is it, definitely. There's nothin' out there that...it may be to 19...y'know, a lot a people wouldn't know what to specify. That's the problem. They don't know what to specify, and so it goes out as a dark area.

KL: Mmm, mmm.

GP: But if they knew what they were doin' in the first placed, it wouldn't go out as a dark...they'd know exactly what you were gonna find. You wouldn't...the best...

SN: Can you ever though? If there's like...you don't know what you're gonna find...

GP: No you don't know what's underneath things, but...it, with experience...

KL: Mmm

GP: You know, I can tell you 'ow somethin's put together. I know 'ow...what fixin's are in it. Through experience.

KL: Mmm

GP: Where somebody can go to college for as many years as they want, but they don't know, unless they've physically actually done the job.

SN: Mmm

GP: Know 'ow things are, y'know, made, and 'ow they're put together, and what they've used for fixin's, and things like that. They won't know.

KL: So it could be difficult then to, to, to get past this problem, unless the people have actually had that experience themselves, or they...

GP: Yeah. Or the trainin' from somebody that has got that experience.

KL: Yes, or they pay somebody who's got that experience.

GP: Yeah. They've got to do really because, I mean as much as I appreciate, y'know you've got all these different conservation officers, but the amount of experience is not, y'know...

KL: Mmmm

SN: Mmm

GP: Again you've...it's very difficult. You can't just come into it, y'know you can't just come into it. I mean alright, you've got to 'ave a feel for it, it's like people've come into my job, y'know... They can, they could be doing the job for 100 years and they'd still never be able to letter cut. You can either do it or you can't do it....

KL: Mmm

GP: ...with letter cuttin'.

KL: Mmm

GP: You've gotta 'ave that artistic...you've gotta be able to set out, you've gotta be able to see it ya head, you've gotta be able to mark it out on the stone, and you've gotta be able to do it...you've got to be, in my opinion, you've gotta make sure it's right.

KL: Mmm.

GP: It's gotta be right at the end a the day. It 'and't to be rough.

KL: Mmm.

GP: But some people could never ever do it. If they 'ad a million years they'd never be able to do it, so some people aren't able to do these jobs, so... But, to somebody y'know that's come in from college, y'know, they're...the problem is y'know, the people sendin' out jobs. It's *muffled* architects, sendin' you out jobs that they don't know themselves.

KL: Mmm.

GP: So I don't know 'ow you're sposed to specify, y'know... Yeah, difficult.

KL: What, what about the business side? I mean is that somethin' you've just kind of taught yourself? Y'know how to...how to price a job, all that sort of stuff.

GP: Yeah I've 'ad to do that yeah...I mean I do me own invoicing, had to price jobs and so... It's very difficult when you're only a small firm like meself. I've, I price everything, I work on everything, I send the bills out for everything.

KL: Mmm

GP: So I do everythin'. 'Part from me wife. She does the books, as in... But err...

Phone rings

SN: What about things like health and safety policies and...

GP: I've got, I'm CHAS registered so I do all that as well. I do me own health and safety side of things.

KL: Mmm

GP: Yeah, so that's... Yeah, it's difficult, but you've gotta do it. But with, with only employin' under 5 men, you're not...there's a lot of it you're not enforced to do. Turn this thing off, sorry (*about phone*).

KL: Is that everything more or less covered? What you wanted to cover?

SN: I think so?

KL: Did you want to do a bit more on materials or have you got...?

SN: I think I've got enough.

KL: Yeah. Erm, yes, so ju...but that's all kind of self-taught? That's just...

GP: Yeah, self-taugh yeah. I've not done any, never 'ad any... No it's experience more that anything.

KL: Mmm

GP: Yeah. So I managed to...which again, I passed onto me son when he was helpin' me. Y'know before...y'know showin' 'im 'ow to price things, and... That's down to experience.

KL: And what about kind of support through, y'know, different associations, trade associations, things like that. Is that...

GP: There was, there was one association, as I say, it was the National Association a Master Masons, which was monumental. But that gets really...they're more about the gravediggers doin' 'ead stone now and it's not really a trade association.

KL: Right.

GP: And you get people moanin' 'bout the type of...and there's always people with ulterior motives that sorta say 'oh well, it's gotta be fixed like this and if it's not fixed like that it's not...'.
GP: It's gotta be a nan registered fixin'.

KL: Mmm

GP: It's gotta be a nan registered fixin'.

KL: Mmm

GP: Because a headstone fell down in Harrogate and killed a child or... So then everyone starts testin' memorials, whether they're firm enough.

KL: Right, yes.

GP: So people get in on, jump on the band wagon really.

KL: Yeah.

SN: What about the Stone Federation?

GP: Yeah, it's for general builders though really, or general stonemasons. Yeah masonry contractors, it's not really specialised.

Phone rings

KL: I think we are more or less done really...

GP: You done?

KL: Yeah. Just, just on that last point, asking you about trade associations and things, one thing that sort of amazes me with, y'know, businesses as small as you, y'know how do you keep up with all this stuff like health and safety, y'know...I mean do you...?

GP: It's very difficult. I 'ave to pay for it, I 'ave to pay for consultants...

KL: Right, so you actually...

GP: ...to actually 'elp me with it, yeah. So I pay yeah...

KL: Uh huh

GP: ...for my health and safety information.

KL: Cos obviously you have to keep up to date don't you?

GP: yeah, you do yeah.

KL: So is that something you do kind of once a year, or...

GP: I do, yeah I do...well I keep in regular contact with it, y'know. I follow the HSE website and...

KL: Mmm, mmm

GP: ...yeah I get, 'ave it sent as much as I can to keep up with the...

KL: Mmm

GP: So that's why, as I say, I know about them the use of vibration tools, y'know...

KL: Yes, yeah.

GP: I mean. But this 'as only been in the last 10 years. 10, before 10 years ago y'know, people usin' air tools an you weren't really...

KL: Mmm

GP: ...there was no, there was no publicity about, nothin' about white, vibration white finger.

KL: Mmm

GP: So this is the miners start claimin' for vibration with the mining job...

KL: Right.

GP: ...but it came into bein' that, that people are aware that vibration does affect ya health.

KL: Mmm. I mean obviously you want to know that for your own personal...

GP: You do! But I w...that's why I'm sayin' to you I wouldn't really...even when I've 'ad lads, I do it meself. I don't put them...I don't make them do it ya see. I would never, I would never be able to live with the fact that I let a lad bray on air tools all 'is life, and then y'know, I'm li...although you're liable, I would feel it's not the right thing to do.

KL: Mmm.

GP: So...

KL: But is this side of stuff, is that important as well for err putting in ya tenders? Do you need to show...

GP: Well it should be. It should be yeah. But it doesn't count I'm afraid. All, all they want, all they want in tenders is the cheapest price.

KL: Oh right. I thought you'd...

GP: And that's all it's...

KL: I thought you'd have to...

GP: I'd a thought so as well. I mean really, like that job at the...I could've pushed a lot more than I did, but down at the Halifax Minster, really I should say how much is down to quality and how much is down to pricin'?

KL: Mmm

GP: I was never given that information back, when we didn't win the contract. Nothing came through. I didn't 'ave a letter...

KL: You didn't get feedback?

GP: ...didn't get any feedback whatsoever. Sayin' that...I never even got a letter sayin' we 'aven't got the job.

KL: Really?

GP: Yeah. That's 'ow bad it is. If I took ya down there you'd be amazed. You'd be gob-smacked.

KL: Mmm

GP: At what's happened and what's gone on and...

KL: Oh I woulda thought you'd get some feedback.

GP: Ya sposed to.

KL: Mmm

GP: Because I sposed to be ab...they're spose to feedback, 'elp ya say 'right,...'...

KL: ...for another time, you can. Yes, yeah.

GP: Yeah, yeah. If ya tender. Yeah, well, y'know. And the thing was, really, it shoulda been, in the specification, it should've been said that the criteria for this contract is...

KL: Mmm, mmm

GP: 70% quality.

KL: Mmm

GP: 30% price. Or...

KL: Whatever, yeah.

GP: Or 80% on price and 20% on quality, or...

KL: Mmm

GP: Yeah. But there was no...nothing came back, but... I know what they've got.

KL: Mmm Well that's an interesting example that one.

SN: It is. Yeah.

GP: Yeah. As I say I've not, that's not...I've not mentioned that publicly to anybody else...

KL: Mmm

GP: But it really... yeah, it disillusions ya really.

KL: Mmm

GP: What it's all about.

KL: I think that covers everything...

SN: Yeah.

KL: That I, that we normally ask I think, doesn't it?

SN: I think so.

GP: Yeah. I'll show you some photos if ya...when you've turned that off I'll show you some...

KL: Thank you

SN: Yes, thanks very much

Adrian Bryson, Firm18PD. April 18th 2012

AB: ...as I say I'm a bit out of touch...

SN: Well I know yeah. But...

KL: I don't think I'll bother tryin' to do any notes...

SN: Err...I'll introduce us...so it's the 18th of April, erm and it's Sophie Norton and Kim Loader talking to Adrian Bryson. Erm, now, you know about me and my interest in conservation and craftsmanship...

AB: I do, yeah

SN: ...and how the 2 things kind of relate together. Erm, well I am interested in how conservation and craftsmanship relate, so how conservation projects encourage craftsmanship and make the skill kind of sustainable. Erm, and I'm working with Kim who's from our management department, who's interested in small companies and err the public sector, and the wider supply chain. So together we're trying to kind of piece together some stuff...

AB: Mmm

SN: ...about the conservation industry in Yorkshire and how that...interacts...or how the craftspeople and craft companies interact with it. So that's what we're tryin' to do.

AB: Mmm.

SN: And we've started off by askin' most people about their experiences and how they came to be where they are. So, it would be good if you could tell us a bit about that please.

AB: Mmm. Well it's quite interesting about where I came to be where I am. Because it was erm....early '70s. And err, probably about '75 actually, and erm I was never particularly...I went, I was an art student and I wasn't particularly aware of much decorative stuff, in this country. Not that I'd seen anyway. I mean I'd been to a few historic houses, but erm, I got holiday jobs in Paris and there was decoration everywhere. And it, it struck me...well actually what I was first impressed was, by was, was that, all the great big doors on the streets of Paris, which looked like oak but they were all grained oak.

KL: Ohhh

AB: And then the more I looked into it, the more everything was decorated. There was stenciling and murals and ceiling paintings still there. So I thought 'oh. I want to do a bit of that'. So I made a study of it...I was a fine artist...

KL: Uh huh

AB: ...but I got involved in studying decorative arts while at college. Which is quite interesting, because it was a conceptual time at college.

SN: Mmm

AB: But erm, I though 'ooh'... First of all I wanted to learn grainin' and marbling because it's, it look...I though 'oh, I just want to do this'. So erm, I looked for evening classes when I got back. So I looked in the...it was in London, so I, I looked in the local book called Floodlight, with all the courses in. And I found a marbling and wood-graining course. So I rang up about it and it didn't exist. It hadn't bee around for years. But they was constantly advertising it, and erm, it was technical college in South London. So I, I rang them up, anyway I rang them up, err, and said... 'oh, there's no

course 'ere anymore, but the fellow that does the c...teaches the City and Guilds painting and decorating, he's a master. He used to do the whole thing from erm glass engraving, through gilding, to sign-writing, to murals, to restoration'. I thought

'ooh, fantastic'. He said

'come along, don't 'ave to sign any forms, just come along, once or twice a week in the evening and join in with the City and Guilds class, and he'll give you some personal tuition'. So I went for 2-years, once or twice a week while I was at art school. And learnt, well basically graining and marbling like cookery. A marble or a wood per week. And built up this massive vocabulary of, of erm skills. Graining and marbling, the old, basically the Victorian skills, if ya like. And ere, by the time... And, erm, I couldn't get enough of it so I did an extra year at college. I did a postgrad, and specialised in decorative painting applied to sculpture and my work. And err, oh but it also meant I had a skill when I left college...

KL: Uh huh

AB: So the first thing I did when I left college was to, erm, contact all the big interior decorators in London and see if they'd got any work for me. Only to find out that there were only about 2 or 3, probably only 2, professional decorative painters, i.e. grainers, marblers, muralists, around. And erm, they weren't young, haha, and err, every interior decorator I went to see gave me work. So I was full time from the day I left college.

KL: Goodness

AB: Yes. It was that, I was th...I wouldn't say it was that easy, it was just really it was the timing. Because everything, it seemed to me, 'ad been rolled out in white or orange up to then and all the paint and decoration 'ad gone. Apart from what was in, kept in the country houses.

KL: Mmm.

AB: And that's what got me going. Yes. I'm still fascinated with it.

KL: Mmm.

AB: And I still apply these skills to my...fine art work for galleries. I find it a really, really useful too. Cos at one time y'know, erm the basic art schools used to teach graining and marbling and gilding and those kind of skills. Perspective and scaling up, and, and, and basic painting and decorating. Course they haven't done that now since the '50s. And it's not very likely it's gonna happen again soon.

SN: No.

AB: But course I 'ad a special interest in it.

SN: Yeah.

AB: 'Aving seen it.

KL: So, sorry, you know more about this than I do, why would they not do that again soon? Just cos there isn't the demand for it or...

AB: It's err, it's not about, it's not about ideas. It's not so much about creativity, it's, it's been classified really as a skill...

KL: Mmm

AB: ...so it's been, really, compartmentalized.

KL: Right.

AB: I think maybe in some specialist colleges. There maybe some actual tuition, y'know in...

KL: Mmm

AB: But the thing is, the students that are now teaching, were never taught. So I don't know...

KL: yes. It's almost gone too far.

AB: ...how it can happen, unless the art schools amalgamate somehow with the technical colleges...

KL: Right

AB: Or whether, what'd be really nice, if each art school had a paint technician, which they used to have, but they don't seem to have any more.

KL: Uh huh

AB: Someone who can tell you about paint layers, and how to body things up, and how to cover easily, an things that will last, y'know.

KL: Mmm

AB: How to mix pigments, the qualities of pigments...see I think that's really important, but... Because I see, I see art students erm struggling in art school, with their work, wasting their time not, not makin' what they make efficiently.

KL: Mmm.

AB: And I think that's quite important. Also I think art, art students, who are very creative individuals obviously, need to be directed into decorative arts and conservation.

KL: Mmm.

AB: So...I think...decorative arts...it's a shocking label really, because it's all ar, it's all creativity. The decorative arts need a...some kind of, higher status. Need, need to be given a boost.

KL: Mmm.

AB: And not be shoved aside by fine art. These cat...it's the categories I think are a problem.

KL: Right.

SN: Mmm

AB: In the past, artists stroke theatre designers stroke textile designers, fabric designers...they're all kind of, the same kind of people. And they all did the whole gamut of creativity. But now we tend to do one thing.

KL: Mmm

AB: It's a problem, it's a problem these days. So where we, where we gonna get our restorers from? And where are we gonna get that fillet, that boost, that's goin' to push money into erm the skills that are needed restoration projects, or just new projects.

KL: Mmm

AB: That's where I'm comin' from.

SN: Do you think there's still like a shortage of your skills? Around?

AB: Erm...yes I do, but I don't think there's the work either.

SN: So the...yeah...

AB: I don't think there's the work. I think the country houses that we've got now have been finished, completed.

SN: Uh huh

AB: And that's where the important restoration works are isn't it?

KL: I guess yes.

AB: So, I mean...n...90 plus percent a my work in the last, what, 38-years, 'as been, has been through interior decorators for new schemes. But using old skills.

KL: Oh right.

AB: You see.

KL: Uh huh

AB: The same skills in the restoration that they are in the new interior decorative schemes.

KL: Uh huh

SN: And, do they tend to be more kind of private clients?

AB: Yes. Generally. Very largely, yes.

SN: Uh huh

AB: So if ya like, it's patronage, it's patronage that provides the best of the work isn't it?

SN: Yeah.

AB: Mmm. I think about 80% 'as been private clients. And then every now and again a nice big project, where it's not necessarily a restoration, it's erm a recreation.

SN: Uh huh

KL: For example...?

AB: For exam...well one of the earliest jobs was for Mr Frankby, who we...who I teamed up with last year in York. And erm he, he was restoring John Soane's country house, which is now no longer in the country. It's Ealing in London, Pitzhanger Manor, and that was a complete recreation. I mean they still had to go through the scrapes and discover what the original schemes were, but erm, in the end there wasn't enough of it to actually restore, so we recreated rooms in there.

KL: Right.

AB: Yeah. I did, I did the breakfast room. That was great fun.

SN: When you say recreate...

AB: Yes, we...well it...you know as well as I do you work from the scrapes on the wall...

SN: Mmm

KL: Mmm

AB: ...the stuff that's...the very early paint layers. And you compare them to the designers plans for the room as well.

SN: Uh huh

AB: And see how compatible they are. And then Mr Frankby looks at everything under his microscope, tells you how things were mixed...

SN: Mmm

AB: And err I come in and have to mix them is the same way. Use the same layers and glazes.

SN: Right OK.

AB: Yeah. It's a really interestin' job he's got.

KL: So what would've been there when you went it?

AB: Well...

KL: I mean are you havin' to sort of strip stuff back to...

AB: That country house had been schools, libraries...

KL: Oh really? Oh right.

AB: ...and lord know what else, and so yellowing gloss paint up to an inch thick on the walls...

KL: Oh god!

AB: ...ya see.

KL: Mmm. So it's taking all that off and then...

AB: So it's strippin' it...

KL: ...and putting back.

AB: Ye, yes. I, I don't do that, the people that go 'round doin' the scrapes...

KL: Mmm

AB: Like Ian and 'is team, and they work in the corners and under the recesses, and where perhaps the paint hasn't been rubbed away too firmly.

KL: Uh huh

AB: Take away the paint layers, put them under a microscope and err find out what was there, how it was done. I mean, they can tell you how much linseed oil there was in the mix, and how fine the pigments was, were ground, where the pigments came from, whether they were local pigments...yeah it's fabulous, a fabulous job.

SN: Mmm

AB: And the nice thing about Pitzhanger was it was recreated as accurately as possible.

KL: Uh huh.

AB: Yeah.

KL: For when it was first built?

AB: From when it was first decorated...

KL: ...first decorated...

AB: First decorated, yes. Yeah, mmm.

KL: Cos sometimes...it seems to be they make a choice as to...

SN: Yeah.

KL:...what period you want to recreate, y'know...

AB: You can't always get the full picture. You've got to make intelligent decisions and record your new decisions.

KL: Uh huh

AB: Mmm...but I've worked on...

KL: Sorry on that one, who would've commissioned that job then? Was that a private commission?

AB: No, that would've been probably English Heritage or someone..

KL: ...English Heritage...

AB: I can't be certain, it's a long time ago. It coulda, it woulda been a body like English Heritage.

KL: Uh huh.

AB: Mmm...I don't think that's National Trust. It could even've been Ealing Borough Council. I know they were involved but I don't know how much. It might've been divided up. I think maybe...

KL: Yes, yes contract....

AB: Yes, Ealing Council were definitely involved because it was errr, it was a jewel in their crown. Right in the middle of Ealing...busy, right in the middle of the busy traffic.

SN: Mmm. Maybe...quite a lot of country houses do belong to councils don't they?

AB: Mmm

SN: Like Temple Newsham, and Burton Constable...

AB: Yes. It could've been public funding.

SN: Yeah.

AB: But usually some other body jumps in don't they?

KL: Yes, yes, yeah.

SN: Interesting. So how long ago was that?

AB: That woulda been, that woulda been probably mid-'80s.

SN: Right Ok.

AB: That would. And that was, that were, that was the busiest time for specialist painters, specialist decorators, grainers and marblers.

KL: Mmm

AB: It was a real boom time. The '80s.

SN: In private and in...conservation?

AB: In private and public. Because you've got to remember that everything had been painted out.

SN: Mmm

AB: And in the 197, 70s, it was realised that the crafts 'ad gone

SN: Mmm

AB: So in the '80s obviously, everythin' was goin' to snowball, which it did. A funny example is I, I erm always got *Interiors Magazine*. It's now called *World of Interiors Magazine*. And err I was always interested in reading the back pages, because it was in the '80s when people started advertising themselves at the back of the magazine.

KL: Mmmm

AB: And from no specialist decorators at all, the back pages were full of adverts for this individuals offering their graining and marbling and dragging skills and cloud skies and... It was absolut, they were absolutely full. And now it's gone back to maybe 1 or 2 again.

SN: Really?

AB: Yes, yes, yes

SN: That's interesting. Do you think that's because of fashion?

AB: It's, it's...partly fashion. A it's been painted over, and B it's not the vogue now for paintin' anything. It's fabrics now and wallpapers...

SN: Wallpapers are quite big at the moment aren't they?

AB: They're really...they're really big. Yes, yeah. Mmm. And erm, a different kind of money comin' into the country as well. I'm sure that's got somethin' to do with it. When I started work....I spose you could call it old money. Most of the money came from...err people with country houses...

KL: Mmmm

AB: ...and old...old money. And then by the mid-'80s a lot of money form the Middle East, so a lot of new big buildings were being decorated and they were being decorated in...copying the rooms that were done in the late '70s, early '80s.

KL: Right.

AB: Plus lots and lots and lots a gilding. So suddenly the suppliers increased massively. By the mid-'80s erm, erm you could get unusual decorating materials almost anywhere. When I first started I could go to 1, maybe 2 places to get grainin' brushes. I could go to Hamiltons or err Wright's of Lymm. I think that was it. Yeah. It was really difficult to get tools. By the mid-'80s you could go anywhere. Almost every little town sold graining combs and graining brushes and badger softeners and things.

KL: Goodness.

AB: Yes.

KL: Mmm

SN: Right.

AB: Where was I? I'm goin' slightly off track there.

SN: You were telling us about Pitzhanger.

AB: I was telling you about Pitzhanger, yeah...

KL: Well you were asking whether it was fashion...well the different types of money, you were talkin' about the different types of money that came...

AB: Yes, and then, and some American money as well in the '80s. And now it's Russian money. Coming in. They're spending the money. On interiors.

KL: We have heard that haven't we, from...Herb...

AB: We know because it's the kind of good jobs we get.

KL: ...Glover. Talking about the Russians doing a house in London, yeah.

AB: Cos something like the last 3 big jobs I did were for Russian clients. One of 'em in, one of them in Moscow.

KL: In...oh right...

AB: Actually in Moscow.

KL: You actually went out to Moscow.

AB: Yes. For, for a month.

KL: Wow

AB: Yes, yeah. I'll show you a picture before you go. It's fan, fantast...

KL: What was that like?

AB: It was...we did, it was Fay and I, and the team. But Fay and I just concentrated on the main guest bedroom, which is the one with the most decoration in it. And we did the whole room in sepia coloured, erm, like tableau of...but all involved err sketched, like monkey scenes. Like a sargiare...trims were trompe l'oeil with purple, intertwined purple. And, s some some gilding. It was absolutely lovely. Yeah.

KL: Mmm.

AB: And, and, and the rest of that...

KL: And was that totally original work then or...?

AB: Sorry?

KL: And was that original or...?

AB: No, no it was a brand new idea.

KL: Yes. Yes.

AB: But in...it had a '30s look about it.

KL: Right OK. Uh huh

AB: '30s feel about it. Cos the décor was '30s, or reinvented '30s furniture.

KL: Uh huh

AB: Yes.

SN: And do you ever have an input into that or do you kind of...

AB: Very much so in that one.

SN: OK.

AB: But not always.

SN: Uh huh

AB: Sometimes the client 'as got particular ideas, and if they're good an interior decorator will encourage it. If not 'e'll seriously discourage it. And sometimes it's a group meetin', and the client may have a paintin' or an objet d'art that he wants in that room. And if it...which kind of tells you what the rest of the room's goin' to be, or needs...certainly for colour.

SN: Uh huh

KL: Mmm

AB: So sometimes it's a group discussion. And it's nice when I get lots of input, obviously.

SN: Yeah. So you quite often meet the clients...

AB: And it can change on the day. We did a, some work for a Russian client a couple a years ago, and it was a ceiling. A new house, almost the size of Harewood. I might've told you about this (to SN).

SN: Don't think so...

AB: Errm, brand new build in Surrey. Portland stone, and err all British craftsmen, from the builders, the masons, right through to the ironworkers, the painters and decorators. Yes. And erm, we painted the basement area, which was directly under the copula. So it's like octagonal, with a s, with a very shallow curved ceiling. And the idea was to do a traditional Italian trompe l'oeil of the view that you might've seen straight up lookin' at the copula.

SN: Mmm

AB: D'ya see? But er, just...rather than go through with that, we realised it was goin' to be...that space was goin' to be a gallery for erm Russian 20th century art. And it didn't need all that colour. So instead we painted the architects plan of the ceiling, so you're lookin' up, all in sepia and stone colours. It was all stone.

KL: Uh huh

AB: And it was like a giant architects plan drawing pinned onto the ceiling.

SN: Oh cool.

AB: All in trompe l'oeil. And saggin' in places, obviously...

KL: Oh goodness

AB: ...and torn and... So, it, it, it can work out really well by not totally plannin' a scheme.

KL: Mmm

SN: So in that instance was there an interior designer and an architect?

AB: Erm, there was an interior designer there. The architecture was...the architect wasn't involved in the interior decoration in that space.

SN: Right OK.

AB: But there was obviously liason.

SN: Right OK. It's interesting

AB: Oh it, oh it was. But sometimes our work is painted out. Haha. We had an instance, and instance of that about 3-years ago, when erm we painted a neo-classical scheme copying a room in Arle. I might've told you about this one Sophie...

SN: I don't think so...

AB: We went to see, we went to see this beautiful room in Arle in the south of France, and it was an 1840s bit of chinoiserie trompe l'oeil on, on linen of erm plasters and niches and these extraordinary grey-blue, almost chinoiserie, vases in these niches. Absolutely beautiful. And erm it was covered in stains and things, because it was a mural on linen that 'ad been taken away at some time and in a the dim and distant past and lost, or bundled away in an attic room...

KL: Uh huh

AB: And the new owners of this house found it and put it back onto the walls, but the walls had been redesigned, so they had to do what they could. And erm, and it looked absolutely stunning in the state it was in...

KL: Uh huh

AB: You know, kind of beautiful, mellow and erm... Erm, we were asked to go and have a look at it and record it in as much detail as we could to recreate it for this client in London. Or rather for the interior decorator. Because it was a surprise for the client.

KL: Oh right.

AB: Hahaha. So, in that instance, Fay and I were behind closed doors for weeks. That's after producing the initial linen painting here in the studio. Anyway, we got them there, we got them onto the walls. And erm, when it came to the day for the client to come into the room, he'd erm, he'd just bought an Andy Warhol painting, a really bright yellow, blue and red Andy Warhol painting. And 'e wanted it in that room. So guess which went?

KL: Haha

SN: Haha.

AB: Ha! Anyway, it didn't get stripped off I think it was boarded up. Or, it may even've been...they may've opened it up again, I don't know. But that was...

KL: So it's still there but hidden away.

AB: And that can happen. Yeah. But that's Russian money. Should I be sayin' this on...?

SN: Well sayin' no names, and it's just for us.

AB: It's a great job for stories like that.

SN: Yeah, I can imagine.

AB: Yes.

SN: So in like all these instances, do you tend to have to price for the work or look for the work, or does the work come to you?

AB: We get a 'phone call, and erm the scheme's bandied about and then we have to give a quotation, or an estimate

SN: Mmm

AB: So it's, it's always a ball park, rough estimate. Cos every single job is different. The only way...pricing's really tricky. You can't do it by the square yard, no matter how many old decorating books you read...they seem to do it like that, but it's impossible.

KL: Mmm

AB: You can only gauge one job on a job you've done before. I mean I messed up a lot in the early days, but err usually it pans out alright now.

KL: Mmm. But do you...have much competition then? Currently?

AB: Not at this level no.

So...

AB: No, but there isn't much work at the moment. And all my erm, Fay and I can have up to 8 or 9 team members sometimes for a big project. If we get a big house, with all different schemes going on, we need a few artists decorators in the team. And so divide the work up according to who can..does what best. How...we give somebody a particular room to do. Fay and I nab the best room, generally! Or if it's a big room we all work together.

KL: Mmm

AB: And it's a system. You know a good painter and decorator er, somebody who's efficient at tracing our drawings, me doing the drawings, erm somebody blockin' in, gettin' the paint layers on, and somebody doin' the gilded mouldin's for us if that's needed. Yeah.

SN: So you have to know who's good at what, you have to know everybody quite well?

AB: Everybody's got particular skills, uh huh.

SN: Yeah

AB: Other interesting story if you don't mind me...diverting a little bit...

SN: No not at all.

AB: Certainly in the '80s erm, we were inundated with people coming from the decorating schools of France and Belgium. The big ones. They're really, really good schools. And they teach you basically grainin' and marblin', and the trompe l'oeil mouldings. That's what they teach, and they teach it by rote. But it's brilliant. You saw the, you (to SN) saw the demonstrations didn't you?

SN: Yeah.

AB: But it's done by formula.

SN: Yeah.

AB: And we used to get all these students comin' over and wantin' to join the team, and do work. But nobody could adapt themselves to a new scheme. They could only do those particular err...it got quite annoyin' after a while. These students show the most exquisite panels, which I was jealous of, but come to doing a job, ya never asked to do those particular marbles, particular woods, in quantity. And so,...I mean an interior decorator'll say 'well I've got an idea for this room, and this is the picture, and these are the colours. Can we do something with this?'. Cos I can't use...I

couldn't use students like that. I had to use people who hadn't done much before and wanted training up. Or untrain... I had an appre, a French apprentice living with us and working with us for a while who we had to untrain.

SN: Haha

AB: ..because she had strict colours on her pallet for particular woods and marbles. Cos if you're copyin' something, you can't use them because you're copying...you're copying something. You're not using that form, it doesn't work.

KL: Mmm

AB: Yeah. We 'ad fun with that. But there was such...I mean they were coming out of these art schools in their droves with this superb folios of stuff, but I don't know how they got any work in the end.

SN: Mmm

AB: I think you have to be adaptable. Really, really adaptable in this world.

KL: Yeah, yeah.

AB: I think...it's why I've always 'ad plenty a work in France and Italy as well.

KL: Oh right.

AB: Because you've gotta be adaptable. You've got to be able to work for interior designers and architects with good ideas, and new ideas. Mmm. There always will be work though for standard graining and marbling and things like that.

KL: Uh huh

SN: Just not at that level...

AB: But not for the fun side of it.

SN: Haha. Erm, so, when you say, when you work with a big team and you tend to work with people that need some training and that haven't been involved in it so much...

AB: Yeah.

SN: ...do you tend to go for like artists or people that 'ave done painting and decorating or...

AB: Generally....we've never needed many painters and decorators because the good, good design firms have got reliable and good painting contractors.

SN: Mmm

AB: If they haven't then we bring in who we know, and it's usually just 1 or 2 people.

SN: Uh huh

AB: Because they're reliable and they're always there. So I can't say we always bring in somebody else, because it's usually the same person.

SN: Uh huh

AB: But we know we get good, good err ground cover. You know we good layering, and plenty of paint layers and rubbing down if we use our own team. It's very difficult to get it otherwise. That's tricky. When we....the best, the best London decorating firms gave us just a fantastic services for graining and marbling.

SN: Really?

AB: Yes, yeah, yeah. But that was in the '70s, '80s. Then it fell off quite dramatically into less and less paint layers, less rubbing down, and that was the time, towards the end of the '80s, when trained painters and decorators were losing out to people brought in as temps. Untrai, untrained painters and decorators, and the standards really, really dropped. Don't know if you know that...

SN: Tell us about it.

AB: And so...we relied more and more on our own. Mmm. We don't...in London, certainly, erm, painting and decorators were about buying a tin of paint and covering it in a colour. Not particularly rubbin' down or worryin' about dusty conditions. Mmm. That's a big deal.

SN: What? Dust conditions?

AB: Yeah.

SN: What makin' sure everything's covered.

AB: Yeah...I spose I was really spoilt in the '70s and early '80s by paint firms that just knew what they were doing, and had been painting and decorating all their lives, and had their apprenticeships...

SN: Mmm

AB: That's the other thing about '60s and '70s, apprenticeships were phased out.

SN: Mmm

AB: Mmm and erm these courses, these block courses got shorter and shorted didn't they?

SN: Mmm

AB: Yeah. And it's only 1 or 2 students that went right through isn't it? To, to get their City and Guilds, and specialise.

KL: So, so did this coincide with the time when you said you were seeing lots of adverts in the back of the magazines?

Y'know...?

AB: In the '80s?

KL: Yeah.

AB: Yeah. Basically everybody was a specialist painter, and everybody was a painter and decorator by the mid-'80s.

KL: Mmm

AB: Everybody could do it. Everybody thought they could do it.

KL: But they hadn't been trained...

AB: Now they've all gone again.

KL: Right.

AB: Yeah. I'd like painting and decorating to be taken more seriously...

KL: Mmm. And people just set themselves up...they just thought they could have a go?

AB: Yes, yes it's like that...

SN: It's still like that...

AB: Yes...it's like that now.

SN: There's no real...

AB: The good people really lose out financially because they, they'll be quotin' for a proper job.

KL: Yes, but are these people not having to...show their credentials as it were, by saying witch jobs they done, what training they done and things? People take them on...

AB: Yeah, well they may well've worked in all kinds of great places...

KL: Oh but it's what...yeah...

AB: Yeah.

KL: OK. But they haven't necessarily done the....right. And so do...do the clients need more education then, or...?

AB: They do, yeah. I don't know...

KL: It's where...there's a responsibility on both sides is there?

AB: I really don't know how it can be stopped.

KL: Mmm

AB: Because, erm, you've got to see quality work as well before you know what quality work is.

KL: Yes, well that's right yes.

AB: Yeah.

KL: Yeah

AB: I mean, when I was a student and I went to price to do these painting and decorating jobs, and some graining and marblin' as well, I did some of that over there as well, and erm I, I, I came to realise that houses were decorated every 40 or more years. Not like in this country where it's maybe every few years...

KL: Mmm

AB: Mmm, and the paint was still in the wall and in good condition. And the doors were still smooth.

KL: Mmm.

AB: And erm, the doors weren't chipping through to white when the paint did fall off. All kinds of things I learnt just by seeing how painting and decorating was done in Paris in the '70s.

KL: So this was just the quality of the work and the materials...

AB: Yes.

KL: ...meant that it could last?

AB: Yes. And intel, intelligent thought.

KL: Mmm

AB: One, one interesting point was that I, I I used to find that under coats were not always in white. That was a revelation to me. Undercoats should be in the colour that you want it to chip through to...

KL: Yeah.

AB: ...when it does damage.

SN: Mmm.

AB: Where are we up to now?

SN: Well we were talking about you and your work I guess...

AB: Mmm.

SN: And, oh, we asked you how you got, how you tended to get work and whether you priced for it, and you said you did...

AB: Well I was at the high end really so I always used to get, always used to get the work. There as always more work than I could cope with in the '80s.

SN: Uh huh

AB: It's real...it's really, really tapered off now. Mmm.

SN: When did it start to taper off? Was it still kind of buoyant in the '90s?

AB: ERm...about 8-years ago, and then about 4-years ago quite dramatically.

SN: With the recession?

AB: Yes. Yeah.

SN: Right. And erm, and...do you think the balance of like public sector work and private sector work 'has changed over that time as well?

AB: I think there's less of it all.

SN: Just less of it all.

AB: Yes.

SN: Proportionally it might be similar.

AB: Mmm. The only jobs that are constant are the important restoration jobs I would think.

SN: Mmm. I think even then that might've tapered off a little bit.

AB: So...I mean are courses being cut as well in skills? Or they...because the recession? Are people still training?

SN: Training courses...

AB: Yeah

SN: I'm not sure about art school, but I would say that people are takin' on a lot fewer apprentices, because they 'ave less work, and so it's harder for them to sustain an apprentice.

AB: Uh huh

SN: And erm I'm not sure how colleges are necessarily affected by the recession, but there's definitely a sort of drive towards efficiency and delivering what your employer needs...

AB: Mmm

SN: Which is...

AB: Well that's good.

SN: Well it is good. But it's also only a window to what...it's not what the employer needs over an 80 year period, it's what the employer needs then and there isn't it?

AB: Mmm.

SN: And it also means that you don't get a very wide basis. Like, for example, the stonemasons, when they're asked, when they're banking in college, they get given stones that are already cut, whereas it would've at one point been a job for a stonemason to...

AB: That's right...

SN: And so you're taking away a layer of skill there.

AB: Mmm

SN: Because the employer doesn't need them to do it.

AB: Mmm

SN: So I'm not sure if it is always good. Ha! So...

KL: Excuse me, I might have to have a shortbread, my tummy just rumbled!

AB: Help yourself.

KL: So are you doin' more...is the nature of your work changing, and you doing more of your own work, if you like?

AB: Yes.

KL: Just...and then doing shows and things and...

AB: I've done some, I've been doin' some really interesting stuff for what, 30 odd years, and a lot of it's my own ideas and there's some wonderful stuff that nobody will ever see, because it's for private clients.

KL: Mmm

AB: And erm, I'm bein' employed by an agent, or by a client, so it doesn't actually belong to me. So I can't put a signature on it. And it's nice...I think it's about time I put my signature to something myself.

SN: Mmm.

AB: And bec, because I've got all these skills as well, I can use them in my fine art work, which I do.

KL: Right.

AB: Yeah.

KL: So it's not commissioned works so much then?

AB: No it's...we're just doing are own thing is what we're doing, and sellin' to galleries and havin' exhibitions.

KL: So is that really what you're concentrating on fully now?

AB: Fully...

KL: Or...is it still sort of a bit of both?

AB: The interior dec...the decorative side of the work...I really don't like to separate it, it's all creative...

KL: Mmm, mmm

AB: But erm, if I get a, erm, a interesting enough job from an interior decorator I'll take it. It's very likely we're going to be going to New Orleans this year. And erm, it's not a, it's not a job we conjured up ourselves. We're goin' to copy a room called Olivia's Room. There's this beautiful room in Rome, in the Museo delle Terme. And it's an early Roman fresco, of a garden. It's only a small room, all blues and greys. Absolutely beautiful. I saw it the first time we went to

Italy in about 1981, and err always fell in love with it. And this gentleman in New Orleans would like it copied. In an ante room, in the French Quarter.

KL: Mmm

AB: So that's exciting. So we won't turn that down.

KL: Mmm

SN: No.

AB: It's like...for a gentleman we worked for before. We painted erm...this is a lovely scheme...see this involved several skills. There was a drawing room and a small colonial style hotel in the French Quarter in New Orleans, and erm, the interior decorator had an idea to copy a lovely silk, floral erm hanging that 'e'd seen in Potsdam, Palace of Potsdam. And it...so 'e said 'Adrian, would you gimme some ideas and do a few samples of how you might somehow recreate this in paint. It was very shiny, like, almost looked like gold thread, and coloured threads. And so I 'ad the idea of papering the walls in gold foil, dragging and antiquing them to look like fabric over the top, which worked, and then hand painting in matte all the floral designs on the top. And it's now gonna be in a book called one of the...*The Fifty Most Beautiful Rooms in the World*.

KL: Wow

SN: Oh wow.

AB: Mmm. Looked absolutely amazing. Ha! We also did, we also did 'im cloudy skies and marbling and things as well.

KL: Uh huh.

AB: As an adjunct to the other rooms...

SN: Are you...

AB: I'm dyin' for Fay to go over and see New Orleans for one thing. Try the cocktails! Haha.

SN: I've never been...

AB: Mmm. It's about bein' inventive with traditional skills y'know. Cos that involved the papering, the draggin, you know the draggin' of transparent colours. Cross dra...as in draggin' one way and then draggin' the other, to make a fabric weave...

KL: Uh huh

AB: ...and then, and then painting and then antiquing over the top. Yeah. These are things that are not taught in art schools...

KL: But presu...so you do this...

AB: But the ideas aren't taught in tech.

KL: ...you obviously have to kind of practice all this, and work it out, and try things out.

AB: Yes. Yes. It's only mixing, mixing ideas isn't it? We're all...there's very little new that we can think of these days, but we're always adapting and part plagiarizing aren't we?

SN: There are always new materials though aren't there?

AB: Yes the wa...

SN: And so, and so do you try to incorporate those in as well?

AB: Oh absolutely. Water-based stuff's been a revelation.

SN: Mmm

AB: Since they've introduced water-based scumbles, none yellowing acrylics and varnishes it's been fantastic. Cos in my early days I had problems with yellowing, yellowing was always a problem. Always bein' asked to do white marbling. Unless you did white marbling really fast and don't varnish it there's yellowing. Especially with the old oil, linseed oil and varnishes and...

SN: Uh huh

AB: And erm, 'specially where there's no light. And...I actually got into trouble a couple a times in the late '70s, early '80s tryin' to work out how to stop the yellowing. But erm, then acrylics came along, acrylics, slow drying acrylics varnished and paints, and err it's been fantastic ever since. Because you don't get this yellowing. It's nasty for white marbling.

KL: Mmm

AB: Yeah. And you can get a job done very quickly as well these days. You can layer up very quickly with acrylic glazes...they seem to 'ave stood the test of time.

SN: Mmm

AB: Never had any problems...

KL: Yes I spose cos in the early days you wouldn't know that of course would you?

AB: No. You kind've had your fingers crossed.

SN: Experimenting...yeah...

AB: I gave a demonstration with err Cole Frankby at err the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum...

SN: Oh really?

AB: This was a long time ago. This was before 'ad been invented. But I think they were, they were workin' on it in the labs, in the labs at the time. And I was spouting about yellowing problems in this demonstration, not realising that the paint manufacturers Ratcliffes were there listening to this lecture, bein' interested in what Ian was saying and what I was doin', which actually amazing isn't it?

KL: Mmm.

AB: And it was...I think it was the paint manufacturer listening to us moaning about these yellowing problems that actually pushed ahead and speeded up the introduction of the acrylic glazes and varnishes. I think so, I hope so...

KL: Mmm

AB: Yeah. And everybody uses them now. Cos they don't work quite the same way, they're not quite as nice to use when you're marbling and graining. Oil, oil mediums and varnishes and glazes are really quite sexy to work, to work with. Acrylic, acrylic's kind of...you've got to push them 'round, a bit sticky, they just don't have that, that same feel. Mmm, and ya can, you can use them in conjunction.

KL: This might sound a silly question but, when you, when you go abroad to do all these jobs...

AB: Mmm

KL: ...do you take your materials with you or do you just get them when you...

AB: If...we improvise. Yeah.

KL: ...get there?

AB: We have them shipped out if we can, and take them with us or erm, or buy local.

KL: It could be any of them? Right.

AB: Yeah. It's no problem, it's not a problem in Europe.

KL: I just wondered if there was very specific things that you know you sometimes...obviously I spose if it was a particularly special thing you'd take that out with you...

AB: Probably the only thing one struggles with is scumble glazes, acrylic scumble glazes. You're not quite sure whether you can get hold of any.

KL: Right.

AB: And erm, can't get gold leaf everywhere.

KL: Mmm

AB: You can't get the right gold sizes everywhere. Otherwise most art shops sell things that we need.

KL: That you would use. Yeah.

SN: Mmm. When you were talkin' about kind of inn, innovative and new materials, erm, can you ever use them in like conservation, restoration projects? Or are you more tied to using certain things?

AB: I think you're more tied to, more tied to using what had been used in the first place.

SN: Mmm.

AB: Unless it's made obvious

SN: Mmm, yeah.

AB: I've not done any high grade conservation, so it's not usually an issue. I'm usually doing invisible repairs to decorative paint schemes...

SN: Uh huh

AB: ...not great painting.

SN: Right OK.

AB: So a client's probably not that interested...in what I use. Though I would use the same materials.

SN: As what you described before...?

AB: I mean pain, paint's just pigment and linseed oil in effect isn't it?

SN: Mmm. Yeah. OK.

AB: So for speedy repairs of say broken stenciling or, or simple murals, acrylics and oil paints.

SN: OK.

AB: Mmm.

SN: And erm...

AB: The thing i...it's to do with expense. If it's, if it's a really important then somebody's going to fund the restoration, it can be done properly over months. And a little repair could cost thousands and thousands of pounds. I've never been able to get into that kind of thing, or wanted to. I've got....mine are to deal with an annoyance of a mural that's been damaged in a private house so...

SN: Mmm

AB: Probably a building that's of no particular importance but needs to be there and that, that, that needs to disappear, that repair, you know. That repair needs to be made and that fault needs to disappear. Mmm.

SN: Yeah, so when you're making the decision it's about the cost.

AB: It's financial isn't it. Mmm. I did some work in Benedict Friar's house, who...he lives in a National Trust house in Sussex. Benedict Friar is an interior decorator...

KL: Oh yes, yes. Sorry I didn't catch... Yes.

AB: That was very, very simple. Dragging and...but it was an early John Fowler scheme. Y'know, Colefax and Fowler, John Fowler the...e wrote English Decoration in the 18th Century with John Cornforth. And he used to live in this house did John Fowler, and he...the first...he started using simple dragging and simple trompe l'oeil moulded panels, which became all the rage in the 1980s, and everybody had it. Anyway, that was the first. And so we had the National Trust monitoring how we repaired that space...

KL: Mmmm

AB: ...because we couldn't...because it was so important, it was an important scheme.

KL: Mmm

AB: Even though it was simple dragging, it had to be done...we couldn't rub anything out and do a...and paint a new panel to match up. We had to do proper little repairs.

KL: Oh right.

AB: Yes, yeah. But there was some funding there ya see.

KL: Yeah.

SN: Yeah. And have you worked on any other sort of funded projects?

AB: Yes I've worked at....ooh allsorts, I'm tryin' to remember. Osborne House...

SN: Right.

AB: Erm, some...

KL: That was relatively recently wasn't it? Relatively recently.

AB: It's....I don't know what they've done recently, but err this was a lady called Pamela Lewis who's in a similar kind of profession as Mr Frankby.

SN: Right.

AB: And that woulda been in the '80s as well. Yeah, that was erm, some a the marbled columns were so badly gone they had to be repainted, y'know, remarbled, and some had to be repaired. So I did, I did that. And erm, some a the

best Siena marblin' 'ad to repaired as well, rather than repainted. There's some really good graining and marbling in Osborne House.

KL: Mmm.

AB: So that was a nice job. A little bit a gilding. Not much.

KL: Uh huh.

AB: And erm work in Hampton Court.

SN: Right.

AB: A recreation of some white marbling in the King's private dining room.

SN: Right.

AB: And erm, an interesting scheme where we had to painted dado to match...to go with the Mantegna's, the Mantegna's on the walls. Cos they'd a plain dado underneath and we did, we did a kind of primitive marble scheme to go with these Mantegna's so... Yeah that was good, that was a good job. That was funded by Historic Royal Palaces, so that's another body...

KL: Yeah.

AB: Yeah, erm...

SN: Do you...you might not be able to remember, but do you...did you have to like tender for that work?

AB: Now then. That was recommendation.

SN: Was it?

AB: Yeah. I think it was. Yes it was. But other jobs for Historic Royal Palaces I've had to tender for.

SN: Uh huh

AB: And usually only 3 people get asked to give a quotation.

SN: Right.

AB: But some a the, some a the jobs are so obscure it's difficult to tender for them anyway.

SN: What, cos you haven't done them before or...

AB: Meaning, meaning that it's pointless tendering if you don't know who to ask to do the job, when there's somebody who can do the job in the first place.

SN: Oh I see what you mean...

AB: I was the man about town who could do all the different kinds of marbling...

SN: Right

AB: ...and graining. And not just do the standard. Cos it's about having the right sense of history as well, having the...it's got to be appropriate for it's place.

KL: Mmm.

AB: Another lovely job I did was for Gorhambury Park

SN: I don't know that.

AB: Erm, Earl and Countess of Verulam at St Albans. Gorhambury Park. Lovely big 18th century...house, an follies in the grounds and...and erm....we did a lovely restoration there. It was erm, I think that woulda been 1840s. Some satin wood graining, in a little ante room in, there was erm, it wasn't just satin grained, it was, it looked like inlaid satin wood, like marquetry in places. There's a, there's, there was a half domed area that was like a fan, marquetry of...painted satin wood. And that was really lovely, very beautiful early water colour graining. But the water 'ad got in and chucked a lot of the best of the satin wood off the walls, which was a shame, so we err had to replace and recreate the room back as it was. That was a, that was a lovely challenge. And that was at a time when I was really into my grainin' as well. Cos it had to have the same touch an feel as what was already there.

KL: Mmm

AB: I loved doin' that. And then, they went onto give us other work after that. And we painted the large double doors in the...'round the entrance hall in err feather mahogany, plume mahogany.

KL: So, so for something like that, would you give them a price before, or just a price afterwards? If it's so unknown maybe...?

AB: Give 'em a price before. Yeah. I kind of know how long a door's going to take.

KL: Right, yeah. Mmm.

AB: And you...for basic graining and marbling, you do learn this like cookery. Y'know, you know your ingredients, you know 'ow long it's going to take

KL: Uh huh

AB: Yeah. The important thing is to just get your own or their painters and decorators to get that door painted up really, really smoothly. Or, or refuse to do it.

KL: Mmm.

AB: That's the thing about graining. If it's not just lovely and smooth and reflects like wood, polished wood then it's hardly...pointless doing it.

KL: Mmm

AB: Unless it's for the under stairs. In the manor house. Haha! Which is normally just comb graining isn't it? Oak graining just run along with a comb or a brush.

KL: Mmm

SN: Uh huh

KL: You see...they advertise these things on the telly don't they? Y'know where you can do...

SN: Yeah.

AB: Uh huh

KL: ...sort of very crude graining...

SN: Yes they do.

KL: Yes.

SN: Erm I had one other question but I can't remember what it was now. Yeah, it was about training...

AB: Mmm.

SN: ...and erm like your skills, and err you mentioned the girl from France..

AB: Yes

SN: ...that you trained. And she was here for...

AB: Well I untrained her, yes.

SN: Sorry, you untrained her yeah.

AB: Mmm

SN: Erm, and I wanted to know if you knew where she is now and what she's doing, and also have you trained anybody else.

AB: Yeah, I know what she's doing yeah. She's self-employed...

SN: Uh huh

AB: ...in France. And erm, not getting' much work. It's pretty much the same in France.

SN: Really.

KL: Right.

AB: Mmm.

SN: But she was OK until...

AB: Erm, yeah she's just ticking along really. Just ticking along.

SN: Uh huh. Right.

AB: Hmmm.

SN: And then about training other people really, and y'know, like what will happen to your skills?

AB: Well I've already passed my skills onto several people anyway.

SN: Mmm

AB: It's just very, very quiet a the moment. And they'll pass their skills onto other people too.

SN: You think?

AB: Yes because when they get jobs they'll need staff as well, and they'll need to bring people and show them how to do things.

SN: Yeah, mmm.

AB: That's how it works.

SN: It ties to jobs doesn't it?

AB: Yeah. You learn by doing a job, and being with a team on a job. And if it's one really complicated job you learn such a lot...

KL: Mmm

AB: Just by watching what people are doing.

KL: Mmm.

AB: We 'aven't...we 'ave 'ad people, new people, so called trained people who've joined us on jobs, and they've messed up. There's a bit of a CV culture at the moment where you have a fantastic CV, but you've not really had the experience.

KL: Mmm.

AB: So....grumpy, grumpy from West Yorkshire.

KL: Haha

SN: Haha. And then there's erm...we also ask people about...well you (to KL) asked a bit about materials...

KL: Mmm

SN: ...and where materials...where you get your materials from generally. Do you have suppliers that you rely on? And are they local or national?

AB: I can get lots a things locally in Halifax.

SN: Can you?

AB: Mmm, yeah. But when it comes to unusual things, Manchester's alright, otherwise it's London.

SN: Right.

AB: I tend to go to an art warehouse in London.

SN: Uh huh

AB: Which also does decorative supplies as well. The whole....so it's a one stop shop.

KL: Mmm.

AB: You can even get...but if I want quantities of things you have to go to a supplier.

SN: Mmm. Right OK.

AB: You can pay, you can pay £11 for a book of gold, or you can pay £30 for the same book of gold. Depending on where you shop.

KL: That's quite a difference isn't it?

SN: A big difference isn't it.

AB: Yes. Mmm, it is.

SN: So you don't have any problems sourcing materials, you can always get everything you want.

AB: Yes.

SN: Do you have any problems with quality...

AB: There's the internet now...

SN: That's true.

AB: ...and things get delivered really quickly these days.

SN: Mmm. Within a week.

AB: Sometimes next day.

SN: And erm, do you get, have any problems with quality of materials.

AB: No.

SN: No?

AB: Paint materials are very simple. And I don't use a lot of bought, tinned paint for instance. I think that's where sometimes the quality's good or bad.

SN: OK.

AB: That's a prob, that's a problem that comes before me.

SN: OK

AB: The layers are already on where the painters and decorators might've had problems tryin' to get the paint to cover, or it, or it's gone funny. It does happen. Manufacturers aren't 100% reliable cos things can go wrong.

SN: Mmm.

KL: Uh huh

AB: Erm, I remember an early job where a blue wasn't working, was kinda wouldn't dry, was fatty and too transparent. Mmm. And, but I think that's the only big complaint I ever remember, to an actual paint manufacturer. And I think they sorted it.

KL: Oh right so you just went back to them and...

AB: Yeah. I mean it's still a problem for paint manufacturers mixing colours and tryin' to get it to stay that colour, or to cover well.

KL: Mmm

AB: Because pigments are all different prices, and the brighter, nicer colours they are, the more kind of dyes and chemicals you 'ave to put in, rather than expensive pure pigment.

KL: Uh huh

AB: That's always gonna be like that. Can't go wrong with all the earth pigments and browns and greens and ochres.

SN: No.

AB: Never, you al...they always cover really well.

KL: Mmm

SN: Do you (to KL) 'ave any other questions?

KL: No I don't think I can think of anything else.

SN: No.

AB: 'Ave a break. 'Ave a think.

SN: Well no we don't...let's stop it for now...

Pause in recording

AB: ...immediately it all changed, and we weren't enough

KL: Yes.

AB: Erm, craftsmen, and artist craftsmen and artisans around, for the demand all of a sudden

KL: Mmm

SN: That's the thing isn't it, it kinda dips and flows.

AB: Yeah. Yes.

SN: I mean in the early 2 thous...

AB: I employed him!

KL: Oh really?

AB: I employed him on a couple a jobs. Yes, yes, yes.

KL: Oh that's nice.

AB: Very soon afterwards. This gentleman was called Ken Bullard, and err... 'e was just a grainer and marbling. It finished 'im because the work just dried up, so 'e ended up painting in a tech.

SN: Mmm

AB: These kids who weren't particularly interested in anything. Just teaching them painting and decorating. I was with all these young men, not takin' a blind bit a notice, runnin' around, chucin' stuff 'round. And err...no apprenticeships. I think I've...

SN: Mmm

AB: ...I was thinkin' even then 'this is all wrong'. Y'know there's all this fantastic stuff to learn...

KL: Mmm. When you went to college then to, to start. You were doing art...

AB: Yes.

KL: ...I mean what did you have in mind as to what you wanted to go onto at that point...

AB: I didn't. I didn't.

KL: Or was it just that what you liked doing, and...

AB: I liked doing the whole thing. Any kind of art I like doing.

KL: Mmm

AB: As long as it involves some painting and drawing.

KL: Mmm

AB: I didn't, didn't mind. I didn't know what direction I was going to go in, 'til I s...did this holiday job. I saw this stuff. I saw the scope as well, and I thought 'oh I've got, I got to get some skills under me belt and learn 'ow to do some a this, cos I can use it'. That was my thought.

KL: Yes, sorry that was the key me....

AB: Yeah

KL: Sorry I'm going into personal mode here, cos....

Personal stuff

AB: I wanted to be some kind of artist, but I didn't know what kind of artist I wanted to be. I knew from bein' little I wanted to be some kind of artist, but then I didn't really make up me mind until I did this holiday job.

KL: Mmm. That's interesting.

AB: And then I needed another year to give myself the time and funding to study. OF course you could get funding then you see. They were throwing grants at us.

KL: Mmm

AB: I don't...it's not like that now.

KL: No. Well that's right, that's right. So...

AB: So my college says 'yeah great! We'll find ya this bursary and do a postgrad'. Wish it was like that now.

SN: It's so not like that now.

AB: What a shame.

KL: Well that's the thing yes, havin' to pay for all this time...

SN: And postgraduate loans are phenomenal. Like you can pay more on a postgraduate loan that you would on a car loan.

AB: But even goin', joining these evening classes for 2-years. I didn't pay anything or a sign a paper.

SN: Really?

KL: Yeah...

AB: 'Don't bother with that...'

SN: You're interested.

AB: 'Don't bother with that bureaucracy'. Course, it's terrible really, it's getting' away with it isn't it?

KL: Yeah, but I mean, y'know...

AB: And that was the college itself! Because I think education was just taken as a right, you just did it...

KL: Yeah, yeah. 'E'd be glad to have somebody in the class who was interested and keen to be there. Y'know, that, that would be what was good for him.

SN: And he probably say how like keen you were on it...cos didn't you spend like quite a lot a time at like the wood museum and stuff?

AB: I did yeah.

SN: Like learning different grains of wood and stuff like that?

AB: I did yeah.

SN: So that's quite a lot of your own time...

AB: I even found a plank museum interesting...

KL: The plank museum?

AB: Wood museum. It's a room full of planks of all the different woods around the world, and you go and look at them and study the grain.

SN: I'd never heard of it

KL: Does this place still exist?

AB: It was in, it was Kew Gardens. I don't know...?

KL: Was it? I just went to Kew a few weeks ago

AB: I haven't been for years. I bet it doesn't exist any more

SN: Probably not on the main err...

AB: I bet it's, I bet all that stuff's in the cellar somewhere. And there was the Marion North gallery...

KL: Oh yes, that, that's still there.

AB: Which, I mean I didn't look at the Marion North's, I was lookin' at the dado

KL: Mmm.

AB: Which is samples of veneers of all the exotic woods from around the world.

KL: Ohhh. I don't know whether it was open...

AB: Labelled. I mean you wouldn't normally notice unless you're an anorak like I was. Haha.

KL: Fascinating.

AB: And I remember once gettin' caught erm, locked into the navel college in Greenwich, y'know the banquet, banqueting hall in the naval college in Greenwich.

KL: Yeah.

AB: Because I was being very quiet, I was tracing the quarter pattern on the oak refectory table. And I was forgotten about. I 'ad to find my way out. In the end I found someone to let me out. Yeah. You get obsessed in things like that.

KL: Mmm

AB: Doesn't 'alf teach y'ow to draw and mix colour.

KL: Yeah

AB: I think what...advice for your...

KL: Oh yes, I wasn't trying to...

AB: He's going to really enjoy college and err, then find the skills 'e wants for 'imself if 'e wants to go in a particular direction.

KL: Mmm. Yes.

AB: Because college is about broadening 'is mind.

KL: Yes well I agree absolutely yes. It's just, it's a bit of an expensive way to do it these days.

AB: Yeah.

KL: Err, yeah...

AB: I wouldn't a missed it for the world. We 'ad total freedom at college.

KL: Mmm

SN: Did you do an art foundation degree? Did you?

AB: Foundation course in Leeds.

KL: Oh you went to Leeds did you?

AB: And then...I went to Jacob Cramer for a year... And then Goldsmith's for 4-years. Yeah.

KL: Right. Mmm.

SN: And art foundation courses can lead onto lots of different things can't they?

AB: Yeah. I almost think, it doesn't go on long enough the foundation bit.

SN: Oh really.

AB: Some, some students mature before others do, and get pushed into specializing before they really find out what they're into

SN: Mmm. OK

AB: I think these general fine art courses are best, for finding your own way...

KL: Well that's right, there's a lot of courses now that really are specialised aren't they?

AB: As long as they've got the tuition and the workshops so that they can explore what they want to do.

KL: Mmm. But I suppose, for you, the interesting thing was that you went to Paris in a way? Y'know, not many people just get summer jobs in Paris. That's quite a...

AB: Ahh no. I suppose not. But students still do. I'm really amazed that students just go off on a sabbatical and just disappear for a year. They just go with their rucksack don't they...

SN: Yeah, one of my friends went to Paris for a year and came back speaking French, a professional violinist. Yeah. So...

KL: Yes. Anyway...

AB: You've got to jump in the deep end sometimes 'aven't you?

KL: Yes. Absolutely. Yes, yeah.

AB: So what've you got on today? What's next on your agenda today? Are you going to interview somebody else?

SN: We already have done! Hahaha!