



Invaluable Tool: Interviews

Helena: Start off with basically how you got into the trade and...

David: Right [crosstalk 00:00:05].

Helena: How old were you when you did?

David: Pardon?

Helena: How old was you when you did?

David: Sixteen. Just sixteen. I started working April '75 and on me sixteenth birthday, we were in December '74, so I were only sixteen and three months something like that, when I started. I got into the trade basically through me family.

Helena: Right.

David: My grandfather and me dad were both buffers down at Mappin & Webb's where Bob...

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Learnt his apprenticeship, and me uncle was a spinner and he did his apprenticeship at Mappin's, and when I left school I went spinning with me uncle.

Helena: Okay.

David: So I were apprenticed to my uncle.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: So yeah, that's how I got...

Helena: Yeah.

David: Into trade.

Helena: Was you an apprentice at any point or was it

David: All the time.

Helena: All the time?

David: Yeah. From sixteen to 21.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: With your uncle?

David: Yes.

Francisca: All the time. Yeah.

David: Yeah.

Francisca: Did you work at Cooper Brothers?

David: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: We got there on this tour around, we'll call in there.

Helena: Yeah.

David: Yeah so I were apprenticed there. I worked at Coopers for six years and one day.

Helena: You know that exactly.

David: Yeah, because I started on 2nd of April. Yeah, I got me rooms on the 3rd of April. Then made us redundant.

Helena: What kind of stuff was you spinning?

David: Not so much of what I'm doing now, not like I'm doing now. I'm doing lot of like goblet and things.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: What we used to do then, were more tea sets.

Helena: Yeah.

David: I used to do a lot of tea sets, both in silver, and in nickel, and in copper. Some gallery trays, but not so many goblets like I'm doing now.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Yeah. Mostly set work.

Francisca: Yeah. We kinda got that impression from Bob that during his time it was mainly trays...

David: Yeah.

Francisca: And sets...

David: Yeah.

Francisca: And stuff.

David: Yeah.

Francisca: How's it... How did it change like, the things you were making as you like, went along in your career?

David: It changed from... I were doing set work there, and then I went to a pewter company for six months and they just make rubbish, basically. Just don't get involved with pewter.

Don't. It's a tip that will serve you well in your life. And then I went to a company called Parking's. Parking's were just round corner from where Pete Perry works now.

Helena: Yeah.

David: Just past Fat Cat, there's a place called Cornish... It were called Cornish Works. It's where that... There's some designer.

Helena: Yeah.

David: Café now on the corner. So, I went there and what they did were mostly set work, a lot of copper, a lot of brass tankards.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: And they also got... Whilst I were there, I were only there two years. We had a big order from P&O shipping line and did a cruise liner, 'Sea Princess', I think it were called. That were a huge order...

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Because you've probably got five or 600 tables on a cruise ship.

Francisca: Oh god.

David: They all want god knows how many knives and forks...

Helena: Yeah.

David: Plus ice buckets and...

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Caviar dishes. It were a huge... butter pats. It were a massive order, that. That were huge. I didn't do a great deal of spinning, strange enough, at Parkings, because you got this enormous fancy press and this press could basically press any shape you liked. For tankers, it would completely press a Georgian tankard. You know what Georgian tankards, it's that shape. All I'd do is flash off at t'end. It weren't a great deal of spinning done there. Then left there and went to another company called Lands Slot. They were at Heeley. What we did there, we did loads and loads of copper tankers, which were bent round and welded together.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: And when I say loads, I mean... colossal amount. We used to do little data-store child's cans. We'd do it bent up, like that, and on it had got two storks, and it got things in the mouth, and one of them said wait, and there were a clock between these two storks. So you could put the time the baby were born, and the little place for its name, and its date of birth. They were cheap tack-crap, handle were lead. That's right safe, isn't it? A lead handle. A Camborough jewels company called H. Samuel's.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Well, we used to supply them with these tankards and child scan. The child scans, we used to do 1,600 a month every...

Francisca: Oh, my god.

David: Month. There were only one spinner.

Francisca: Oh, my god.

David: I had 1600 of them. We used to do 300 straight tankards for them every month and then 300 key ones. This were a little key that was soldered on it. If you were eighteen, you had a little eighteen stick on. If you're 21, you had a 21. We used to do 300 of them every month for them. Without fail. Every month.

Helena: That's a colossal...

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Unbelievable.

Helena: That's ridiculous.

David: Unbelievable. We used to do at least 12-1500 them cans a week... A month. Sorry.

Helena: How many people were working in the company?

David: There were me, there were two coppersmiths, a buffer, and two polishers. Big Dave used to come here with a seat guy and he used to come in at nighttime and weld these things together.

Francisca: That's mental.

David: That's all they were. I basically lived at work.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: I used to get there at eight, used to go home at six, and then Saturday mornings as well till probably twelve o'clock, twelve, one o'clock. That went just went on and on and on.

Until Gerald Ratner who was the top guy at Samuel's made his famous statement that, "what lasts longer?" Can you remember it, Ashley? "What lasts longer? A pair of our earrings or a prawn sandwich. They said, 'Prawn sandwich will last you longer.'" Basically, what he were trying to say were, is that we don't make Asprey & Garrard standard stuff, but it's some'at that everybody can afford.

He just cracked this little joke and newspapers completely took it of context and basically said, "He's admitting that they sell crap." And our orders went from 1600 a month to none...

Francisca: Oh, my god.

David: Basically overnight.

Helena: Wow.

David: It just stopped, and that were it. That company put all their eggs in the 'H. Samuel basket' to such an extent that they were basically the only company we were working for. So when that happened, that were it and it folded. And we all got made redundant on 23rd of December.

Francisca: Oh, no.

David: 23rd...

Helena: Good timing.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Of December. Well, they got receivers had come in. Receivers who were new to the company. The one thing receivers would only pay for what you've done, and they weren't going to pay holiday pay. So, we knew it were...

Helena: Was it piece work?

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Pardon?

Helena: Was it piece work?

David: No. We were paid by hour.

Helena: Okay.

David: By hour, but they weren't going to pay us holiday pay off at Christmas, so they made all redundant just two days...

Francisca: That's awful.

David: before Christmas. 'Christmas Eve Eve', 23rd of December.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Once that happened then... I'd always wanted to go self-employed, because me dad had been self-employed for 20, 30 years or so, buffing. When you've got a job like that, you know, all right, money weren't particularly good, but you just knew you were never going to be out of work...

Helena: Yeah.

David: Until he said that. If you've not got that push to go, then you think, "I'll stay where I am." Suddenly when you come along and say, "Right, you're out on your ear." You've got nowt to lose then. At that time, me uncle were still spinning on an occasional basis further down the street in a right dump of a workshop.

He said, "Well, look," he said, "There's a lathe here. Jack," who we worked for, he said, "He's quite happy for you to come in and out," and he says, "I'll pack in." Don we're going to retirement anyhow. I went into this workshop set up on me own. The rest is probably history, as you say.

I did 17 years in that workshop. I wish I got some photograph to show you what it were like. What it was is we were above the last knife forging company in Sheffield and they closed down. Then it were just me and this Trevor got workshop above me, were a pewterer. There were just those two in this massive building. People, some wide boys, some got to find out that this building were empty and Watson buildings go lots of copper wiring,

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: So they bust in and they were taking, stripping bottom out first. Then they moved up on us, started burglarizing us. We almost got burgled twice in a weekend.

Francisca: Oh, god.

David: I thought I can't carry on like this.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah.

David: Look at it I heard that this workshop were free and I came and I said, "Any chance in me having it?" I into college and they said, "Yeah, we'd like you on board." That's where I've been ever since.

Helena: Have you seen a massive change in the industry? In the trade?

David: Oh, god. Yeah.

Helena: Since you started?

David: Yeah. Ridiculous change. More so with Bob, but look at me. When I started companies that were still bigish companies nowadays, basically just BSL ain't they.

Helena: Yeah.

David: It's BSL and I think these Cars.

Helena: Yeah, Cars.

David: That's basically it, but when I starting they were Coopers. Just down there, there were Robert's & Belk's, Parkings over, well, I told you I were near Pete Perry's.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: There were Cob's, bottom of Broad Street. There were Dixon's all the way out to Hillsborough. Then there were occasional little mesters like what me and Bob are doing now.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: There weren't so many of them. The most people went to these bigger companies like Coopers, I would imagine. When I went there they employed probably about a hundred people actually manufacturing that's where staff...

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Office people and things like that. It was split into two departments. There were hollowware department, which is what I were in.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Obviously making hollowware. Then there was flatware, which was spoon and fork. Yeah. Most of the companies were like that.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: They were employing much more and just before I started, probably 5, 10 years before hand. We're at millennium galleries now that were Walking Halls. Walking Halls that were probably bigger than all others put together. That were a massive place.

Helena: Yeah.

David: There were Viners. Then going back a few more years, so Bob, when Bob younger, they were Mappin & Webb...

Helena: Yeah.

David: On Queens road. That... I don't know if Bob's told you how many silversmiths that employed...

Helena: Yeah.

David: But there were dozens of them.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: That's basically all gone now.

Helena: Yeah.

David: We've gone back now to this... To what it probably were two or 300 years ago. Where there's just people like me and Bob, and yourselves to a degree.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Sitting up on your own...

Helena: Yeah.

David: Trying to make your own living.

Helena: Yeah.

David: The other side of it is, I would say... How would I say, I probably say about 80% of people I work for now are young women.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: When I were an apprentice the only women who worked there worked in the spoon and fork department doing some menial job that we just going to send you bar or worked at warehouse. That were it. There were none doing any silversmith, chasing, or engraving, or anything like that. That were all done by men. None at all. It weren't heard of that girl is a silversmith.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: It didn't happen. There were women buffers, but you want to avoid... When I'm an apprentice, I'm six... I'm a very naive 16 year old...

Helena: Yes.

David: And me uncles walking through, like a rabbit warren up an alleyways at Cooper's and we walked past that door. He says, "Sees that door," he went, "don't ever walk through that door." I says, "Why?" He says, "Women buffers are there." He says, "You don't want to deal with them."

They all had just caught very tail end of these women buffers.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Bob knew and far better than what I did.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: They all seemed to be called Elsey and they were all about, I would say, late sixties, early seventies. They got to a point where they couldn't get girls to do it. You take one look at a buffing shop and say, "Frank, you want to do that?" He'd go, "No chance."

Then they were start to... While these women were there they were begging them not to retire until they got some kids trained up. One of the lads that they trained up, roommate of mine I used to go to school with, old Kev, he went to work with these buffers. He'd been there about two or three months, he went, "Come to the toilets with me." And I went, "Why?" "I've got to show you." "What?"

Francisca: Oh, god.

David: He pulled down his trousers. "What's going on here, Kevin?" He describes what they've done. They've got him down, they got this black rouge, it's like a paste, and they painted him. It don't come off.

Francisca: Oh, god.

David: It's like peeling off cello tape.

Helena: Uh.

David: They painted him. Yeah. You avoided women buffers.

Helena: Yeah.

David: Yeah, that's the big change.

Helena: Yeah.

David: We've now gone... It's shrinking back to... The days of making these huge orders for hotels and shipping lines have gone. There's no need for these big companies.

Helena: There's no demand for it either...

David: No.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: No.

Francisca: Is there?

David: Demand's gone. I don't think I've spun a teapot... Oh, I've just spun one tea pot I think in 20 odd years I've been self employed. That run on some chucks, which I used to work on as an apprentice. When you want one, I said, "I know there is a chuck that'll do that."

That just doesn't happen anymore.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Sometimes that... When I were there we probably make 20 or 30 coffee pots or teapots at a time.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: I'm not in 20, 30 teapots in 30 years now. That's what's happened. We've gone back to more, it's more craft work...

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Stuff now.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: Do you find it more interesting now that you're working for individuals and...

David: Oh, god. Yeah. Working... Doing something 1500 time gets pretty boring.

Helena: Yeah, but I guess that's a [crosstalk 00:16:00] really good way to learn.

David: Oh, fantastic.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Absolutely, brilliant way.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: If for somebody want to apprentice just to get used to it in a specific job it worked.

Helna: Yeah.

David: Yeah. You couldn't beat it.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: You couldn't beat it. That's what you need. That constant repetition...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Again. Do again. It just becomes second nature to you.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Francisca: Yeah.

David: From that point of view, it were great. Same with work Cooper's. We'd sometimes say we were doing 15 or 20 teapots at a time. That's a lot of work...

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: Yeah.

David: Yeah. That's the way to do it. Doing ones and two is no good.

Helena: Yeah.

David: You've got to have that repetition.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: It's much more interesting now for you?

David: Oh, incredibly. Yeah.

Helena: Different people, with different ideas, and...

David: Yeah, absolutely.

Helena: Yeah.

David: Yeah. A lot of times you've got... Somebody will come to you and an idea and you think, "Actually there's a better way of doing."

Francisca: Oh.

Helena: Yeah.

David: or "That's not going to work."

Helena: Yeah.

David: That things happened to you basically, when work is like a machine...

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Knocked it out every day. Wendy, you could said, "What you've done at work today." I said, "Well, same as what I did yesterday, and the day before that, and what I'll be doing next week. Exactly the same." Child cans and tankers. It were mind numbingly boring.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: Yeah.

David: Terrible. As you said, great practice.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah. Best way to learn.

David: Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely.

Helena: I also wanted to ask, because I said our projects quite heavily based on the tools. We wondered if you had a particular favorite tool at all? Maybe one of your burnishes or just the lathe, in general is.

David: That lathe I'm working on now is best lather I've ever worked on.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: That is no doubt to that.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: How long have you had it for?

David: Since I started self-employed. That lathe were in there and I bought it off a guy.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: I've got a second lathe, but that's a backup one. That's when Sarah coming down doing some spinning for me. Nah it's whatever tools you need at that time...

Helena: Yeah, I guess.

David: To do specific jobs your favorite.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: There's not all, this is me favorite burnisher.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: They all have a specific role and task to do, but it is a good lathe that.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: How many burnishers do you have?

David: Oh, god. Hundred.

Francisca: They all got the dates on them as well.

David: They all a few things I've not dated them.

Francisca: Really.

David: What I've got, I've got loads of burnishers, but I've got a hardcore of, probably about eight that I use most of the time.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: I've got loads of others. Somehow I don't think I've ever used those. You pick them up...

Helena: Yeah.

David: As people retire.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: Some of ones I'm using now... One of the burnishers that I use quite regularly was made by my uncle when he was an apprentice.

Helena: Wow.

Helena: He made the burnisher?

David: He made the burnisher himself. Yeah. At or around file.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: He must have made that, I would say what, about 1946. Something like that.

Francisca: Geez

Helena: It's one of your ones that you use the most?

David: Well, it's one that I use on a regular basis.

Helena: Yeah.

David: I won't say I use it all the time.

Helena: Yeah, but...

David: It's one that I use quite often. Yeah.

Helena: Have you ever made one before?

David: Oh, I made loads. I used to make... When you were apprentice that what first job you did. You had to make your own tools. You couldn't go and buy them.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: You bought some silver steel, you heated it up, and bashed it around, and got it to the shape you were after, and ground it up. Yeah.

Helena: Yeah.

David: Made me own when I were an apprentice. Now, you had to harden it which were the tricky bit.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

David: Then about, what would it be about 35, 36 years ago, me dad was talking to a guy in local club where he used to basically live. He got talking about spinning burnishers and this guy says, "I could make them in tungsten carbide." Well, tungsten carbide is seriously hard.

Francisca: Yeah.

David: We had one made. We give him the dimensions where he wanted be made of and oh, just, it like big leap forward, so we had quite a few made. That ones I use most of the time now.

Helena: Yeah.

David: Rather than the silver steel ones.

Helena: I guess a little bit about tools I wanted to ask, is there a particular set of tools that you've

always used that you are attached to?

Robert: Tools?

Helena: Yeah. It's like particular tool...

Robert: Yeah. If you... You've both been in my shop.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: You'll noticed all the tools around. The tools that I need.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: In actual fact, silversmith doesn't need many tools. He needs more now,

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: Than what he used to, but basically, it's file, couple of files, hammers, but you see, you can't buy the files that a proper silversmith uses...

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: Because they're bigger. You can't buy them at Cookson's. Usually, they're quite hard to find. You can get them...

Helena: Mm-hmm.

Robert: But it's a bit different to being at the end of a rumble street.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: Just going in the door at factory and see them made and then they give them away. And that happened to me of course as an apprentice, have I told you? We used to go into this factory where they were made and they just gave them to you.

Helena: Yeah. It was handy then wasn't it?

Robert: Yes. It was.

Helena: Would you just go...

Robert: Yep.

Helena: And ask for what you wanted?

Robert: Yeah.

Helena: Like particular size...?

Robert: Yeah.

Helena: Or roughness...?

Robert: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: Do you want it to file this? Do you want it file that? It was same with a lot of things...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: Then. Of getting stuff. They used to look after the trade really.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 2: Tools were everywhere. Everywhere was a tool factory or a silverware factory.

Helena: Yeah.

Speaker 2: It's... Tools were made and that's... It's the one thing you miss.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

I was going to say it must be strange seeing how the city center changed over the...

Speaker 2: Yes.

Francisca: Over your career?

Speaker 2: Yes. Oh, yes. Yeah. The tools on me bench. Yeah. I have a feeling for some of them. Some

of them were given to me by a French... Silversmiths used to put their name on them or mark them somehow.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: I've got one. Francois Neyt. N-E-Y-T. He was French. Came to Sheffield as a silversmith late 18 hundreds and his son went on to be a silversmith. He gave me his tools when he retired. It's got Francois Neyt on it.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: You think, hmm.

Helena: Are they still quite usable?

Robert: Oh, yeah.

Helena: Yeah. Still as good as they were.

Robert: There's a hand one.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: It's a micrometer thing, but it's a hand one. Everybody use batch ones now.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: But I still use that one.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: Funny enough.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: There's others. There are others. You get used to them if you have a row of hammers...

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: And you're doing repairs, you pick out a hammer you want. The snaggle is you put it back down on the table, and then you bet you put it back down on your bench, and you think, "Oh, I need another hammer for that, so I'll pick another hammer up." In the end, all your hammers are out on the bench...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: And you don't know where you are, so you have to have a clear up.

I usually have a clear up every night now.

Francisca: Every night.

Robert: Yeah. If the tools that should be hung up.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: As for the stakes, well, you just look, because you've lived with them that long you know what to pick up.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: That's where people like, no disrespect, you have to look and think what stake fits that part.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: I know what I'm looking for.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: You wouldn't.

Francisca: Yeah.

Yeah we have to try and figure it out.

Robert: You got to find the shape to fit that part.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: That's what happens. You only learn that.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I wanted to ask because you've seen the trade change so much

over the years. How do you see the future of it? How do you think it...?

Robert: Future, I think it's quite good. It'll change. It's changed obviously.

Helena: How do you think it will change again?

Robert: No, I don't. People like me won't be around, I don't think. I don't think anybody...

there'll be older people that can put things right or make something.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: There'll always be silversmiths around. That's where you come in. It changed because ladies now do it.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: It's done through university.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: As a course. Not as good as what we'd like.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: No.

Robert: But it's done.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: You can see what you've done here of what it's like.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: But, that is the way it's gone. It's become more of a craft.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: But you can make with modern production, modern methods, you can do some beautiful things. You can make them and people with ideas can make them. I'm only a maker to be quite honest. I'm not a designer. I can put things together, but I just like making.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: The hardest part is selling it...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: When you've done it. That is, people will always want nice things.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: A bit unusual.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: They'll always want that. I'll always be around. It might not be in the next few years, but it will. People will always want nice things, new designs, new stuff, new ideas.

I'm quite hopeful for it, to be quite honest. I think it's great. Especially, younger people coming into it and, producing it, producing the ideas, but a teapot is a teapot. I think silver teapots and that sort of stuff has gone by the board. Might come back. People might want a silver...

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: Tea service at some time, but it's very rare.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: It's very rare. That sort of thing is gone. The tableware is gone to a certain extent.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: I get fed up of doing goblets and things like that, but people always wanted glass of wine.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: They'll always drink a glass of wine. It's a product. Drinking vessels have taken the place of teapots...

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: As a layout of a table. At one time it used to be salts. Big salts in the 1800's, because salt was the thing to have. A big salt on the table. Then it was candlesticks.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: Now it's gone to drinking vessels. Things like that. There'll always be something there to make a table look nice. There'll always be something to make. I'm nearly sure of that.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: It won't be made in the quantity it ever was.

Francisca: No.

Helena: Yeah.

It's definitely gone more one-off pieces than...

Robert: Yeah.

Helena: A batch of...

Robert: Yeah.

Helena: Pieces.

Robert: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: Yeah.

Helena: It's more individuals now.

Robert: Yeah. Small individual pieces.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: It'll go more like that, which is what you were creating.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: Which is what you are creating. It's lovely to see really.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: At least somebody will be doing it. As for the repairs, which I find as interesting as anything...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: To be able to repair it, take it apart, repair it, put it back like a silversmith made it, probably in the 1800's, it tells a story.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: You can do things. You can do things with it and make it look like it was in the 1800's, because silverware is actually produced better, but they use thinner material, it is more malleable now...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: But just imagine making some of the older pieces in gaslight or candlelight.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: Some can. Just imagine it.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: Working in the hovels that I worked in.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: They were around. The mind boggles.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: When you see all this wonderful stuff that was made then, it took them... It didn't take them three weeks.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: It took them years.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: People forget that. You can't do it in three weeks.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: Time will tell. There'll always be people wanting to make it...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: And there'll always be people... There's a lot more girls interested in it.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: Or ladies. Very much so, and that's not a bad thing. I couldn't have seen either of you.

Actually, pulling wire around a big tray.

Helena: You never know.

Robert: Well, if you get an... If somebody, if you want to make a big tray say, "Yes."

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah.

Robert: Just say, "Yes."

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: But a big tray is useless.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert: To be quite honest.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Is it?

Robert: Well, yeah. Carries the tea set.

Francisca: Yeah.

Robert: Generally.

Helena: It'll just carry all the vessels round.

Robert: It always a five-piece tea set and a tray.

Helena: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah.

We're curious why you decided to focus more on tool making. Well, since un,, well, from my experience, you were just making a lot more vessels before...

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: And now you've started to go into tool making. Is there a specific reason?

Kurt: Just felt like it, ain't it?

Helena: Or you just decided to? Did you feel like there was a market for it or...?

Kurt: No, just...

Helena: Enjoy it.

Kurt: Yeah, just enjoyed it. I just needed it. I just needed the tools...

Helena: Okay.

Kurt: So I made them and then once I'd done that I had ideas. Like, "Oh, they might look cool like this actually." I liked the aspect of old Victorian tools, or whatever, they're quite ornate.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: You might see some bone saws, some doctors bone saws, in museums and they've got a really nice, forged frame and then the handle's really ornate. It's crazy because it's a tool. It just looks really nice. I like that. I like that it's got some nice character to it and it's something that you use every day. I don't really like ugly stuff, it puts you off. That's like subjective, but when you think about some things, it's just not. You don't like the look of it, and you see it every day, and you have to use it, it puts you about. I'm quite sensitive to that. If I'm working in a book or something or writing ideas down. If I don't like the look of a page I'll tear it out, because it'll put my creative mindset off. If I keep looking at that... I don't want to see that anymore.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: I can't like it, I hate it. Yeah, if I've got a tool, it's the same thing as that. If I don't like the look of it, then I can't. I don't like, it doesn't look right. It has to live in my environment. It has to live in my world...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: And my world is what I want to, and I can choose what I want in my world. My tools are special, because I use them a lot and feel like it makes me feel good, but...

Helena: I guess, yeah. I can imagine it. It's the most satisfying thing using a tool that you've made.

Kurt: Yeah, exactly. That as well. Yeah. If you can. It's nice being able to make the thing. It's such an important thing in the world being able to make the tools to make you the job, because what are you going to do if you've got a job and you can't get the tool, because it doesn't exist.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: You need that tool. You can't get it anymore. Or it never existed. It's just good to figure out how to be able to do that job without having to rely on someone else, because there might not be anyone you can count on to do that for you. I say it extends to repairing stuff as well. If you can repair your mistakes in this kind of work, you're much better off. If you never made a mistake on anything that you've made, then you're not really winning. You're fooling yourself, because it doesn't matter how much, how far you going, you just [inaudible 00:34:43] , because you just... You might. Yeah, fine. You can get it done, but if you ever make a mistake, or you need to get something repaired, are you going to be able to do it?

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: I don't know, you, I find that I learn more by making the mistake...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: So I know what not to do and...

Helena: Yeah, definitely.

Kurt: How to fix it when it happens.

Francisca: Yeah. It gives you more an understanding of what your...

Kurt: Yeah, definitely.

Francisca: Practice as well.

Kurt: Yeah, for sure.

Helena: You won't learn anything if you don't make any.

Kurt: Yeah. Then a lot of the reason... Exactly. Yeah. Then a lot of the reason why I make tools is, because of that. What I said earlier. You can't get them anymore.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Or you never could. Some of the tools that I've made, it's stuff that silversmiths would've made themselves...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: By altering a certain tool in a way to work for the job for them.

Or quality. Like I was saying earlier, again, this extends to that quality control is shot and tools just shit now. Most tools, not all of them, but majority of them and they're just crap.

Helena: Most, not the same as before.

Kurt: No and...

Helena: I guess it might be the same as what you said before about using brass instead of nickel.

Kurt: Yeah. It's that.

Helena: They're using cheaper materials to make the tools...

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: And not as...

Kurt: Quality standard, quality control's...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Down as well, because it's got to be efficient like that.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: Then businesses have gone elsewhere and it's not to say, like I was saying, everyone's quality controls in individual and you can't, you can, if you want, but I don't think you can rely on anybody else's standard of quality if you know that a job's got to be a certain way.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: I think that's extended to how stuff has gone in a trade, if a business has been sold off elsewhere then the standard quality is different to them and it's more focused on faster production. Efficiency in that more than the functionality of the tool. Yeah.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: More like that, because look at this. This is, I can tell this has been made in a company back in the day that would've made these.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: But you don't find anything like that. It's not the shape of the forging hasn't been refined or it's quite rough, but it does exactly what you needed to do...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: What it needed to do back then. All the teeth have been cut correctly and it has been used. You tell it's all worn now, but it has been used and effectively. It still cuts reasonably and it's probably a hundred years old or something like that.

Helena: Yeah. I think...

Kurt: You get files now and they're just crap.

Helena: Yeah.

That is true. I think all these are extremely old, but that's one reason why I wanted to restore them, because I know they still could be really useful.

Kurt: Yeah.

Like I said, like what you said earlier, you asked me about the steels and why I think they used that steel to...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: Repurpose it to make another tool and that's exactly that...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: In what you just said, because even if that doesn't cut anymore there's so much you can use for that steel.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: It's invaluable.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: If you know what to do with it. Yeah.

Helena: Like you, your grandad would say.

Kurt: Invaluable!

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Yeah. I didn't see much of my grandad make. He was always a good influence and inspiration for when I'd be creative when I was younger. Drawing pictures, always coming up with ideas and stuff like that. Making plasticine models or whatever, pipe cleaner stuff. Yeah. It's cello tape and stuff like that.

Helena: Bit softer stuff than what you're using now.

Kurt: Yeah. That's why I like doing, making out of all different materials. I don't just working.

That's what I do professionally, but silver and metals and stuff, but I like working in

wooden and all different types of mediums, whatever. That's why I got into tools, because whatever I like, whatever I need, I prefer to make it. I can make it to my own standard and exactly how I want it. There's not going to be a little bit that's off...You know if we find something that's almost right and I'll probably have to pay a bomb for it as well and then there's just this bit, I'm like "Why?" It's got that bit of crap on it there, it just puts me about. Yeah.

What was I saying before. I'm diverting

Helena: It was the saying about how they got you into doing...

Kurt: Oh, yeah.

Helena: Metal work.

Kurt: Yeah. I think mostly just through my dad. It probably is an inherent trait or something like that. Being creative in that way.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: Probably through positive reinforcement and influence. Keep doing that. Yeah. Keep playing with them pipe cleaners, son.

Francisca: Do you remember the first bit of metal piece that you made or...?

Kurt: No.

Helena: Did you do it...?

Kurt: Probably something daft. I don't know a ninja star or something. I don't know.

Helena: From dad's car.

Kurt: Yeah. Bowie knife was one of the first ones. Yeah. I made Bowie knife for my dad. Yeah. That was probably one of the first things that I can remember when I was like, "Oh yeah, I like this."

Helena: Yeah. Something that you could really get stuck into.

Kurt: Yeah, because it's cool back then when you're a kid...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: And you get to play with fire...

Francisca: Yeah.

Kurt: And you to hit stuff and it's dangerous, but...

Helena: And you make a knife out of it.

Kurt: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Kurt: Yeah, you get to make something as well, that's dangerous. Yeah. There's a lot of fun aspects about it, but then at the same time you've got a sense of responsibility to be safe. I think that's good because it gives you a sense of if that's your thing. If that's.... That's when I knew. Well, I always wanted to be a creative person, because that's all I've done. I never really enjoyed doing academic side of school until more recently when I found it more useful. I've had to use it, so I've had to learn off my own back and stuff.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: Yeah. I've always wanted to make stuff. When you are young you think an artist. An artist is just a profession. I'll just be paid to be an artist.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: You don't have really any idea about...

Helena: No.

Kurt: What artist is and that kind of thing. Then I come a bit jaded from it. Then when I actually learned by doing fine art school this is all bullshit it's analytical. Well, I don't want to be psychoanalyzing, why people have done something, because they've done it just because they've done it. That's all like that...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Never mattered to me. I just do some things because I wanted to.

Then so making was just the thing and then I likes that, because it gave me, working in metal and stuff, because like I said, you can manipulate. It feels like... It's the closest thing to being able to manipulate something with your hands.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Forging and stuff like that. It gave me that sense of responsibility to be like a grown-up and be safe around this stuff. This is the point where it's not like you're not playing with your paints and stuff like that. You're playing with like fire now and stuff. You've got to be precautious about all this. You've got to take precautions, and be conscientious for safety of yourself and other people, and everything about the job, and I liked that, because I liked... One of the main things is I liked making. I liked the idea of making my parents proud and my grandparents proud, so that's probably the main motive of why I do it.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Because everything that I want to make regarding... Yeah. Everything I want to make

that's the majority of it is in metal. I don't make it for...

Francisca: Commercial?

Kurt: Yeah. I don't make it for thinking about how much I can make on it, because I don't really sell any of it. Apart from the saws maybe now and again, but most of this stuff I've just made, because I want to show my granddad this.

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: Or I want to show my dad because I like to make him proud.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: That's pretty much it.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: It's the best and most rewarding part of it.

Kurt: Most rewarding. Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: It's an ode to their legacy, kind of thing, I guess.

Kurt: Yeah. I like it. I show them and then they can... It reassures me that I'm doing good by them, I guess, and I like that. Once... Money's all right, but you got it in your pocket and then it's easy come, easy go, isn't it? It's gone like that. It doesn't really mean much, but having positive reinforcement from your family is much more valuable to me, I think.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Francisca: Yeah.

Kurt: Positive reinforcement from myself makes me feel good. Making this stuff for myself as well. Don't know if that answered or...

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Yeah, definitely.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: Even more even more so.

Francisca: Yeah.

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: I guess one thing that we did want to mention, because I think I mentioned before that we were looking at the little masters, and that how they had their own jobs for things,

and knowing that the industry is not as big as it used to be, and there's definitely not as many silversmiths as there used to be. Do you think that we as the younger generation of silversmiths have some responsibility of keeping this industry alive? Does that make sense? For example, having people in specialist areas like the little mesters?

Kurt: Can you read the question back to me again please?

Helena: Yeah. Sorry. I rambled through it.

Kurt: It's all right.

Helena: Basically, what I've wrote is saying over the years universities have either been dropping silversmith courses or changing them to mixed media jewellery focused courses.

Kurt: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: And knowing that the industry's not as big as it used to be.

Kurt: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: With this in mind, do you think we as a younger generation of silversmiths have some kind of responsibility in keeping the industry alive? For example, having people in these specialist areas like the little mesters?

Kurt: Like little mesters.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Yeah. A hundred percent. Yeah. Responsibility, that's subjective, ain't it? I don't know.

Yeah. That's up to everyone to do that. I don't know... you can't influence, I don't think you can influence a mass of people unless they really want to do it. That's a good thing, but...

Helena: Do you think... Do you think if we don't do anything, it will probably...

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: Maybe, not...

Kurt: Yeah. For sure.

Helena: Survive that long.

Kurt: Yeah. I'm not saying... Yeah. I'm talking in a... I'm trying to speak in facts, I suppose. I don't know what the right term is. Yeah, no. It's going to have a negative thing on it.

Yeah. I think definitely it's a good idea to collaborate with each other and work together, because I think that, I was talking to someone about this a while ago, I think that the way it's going to go there's not going to be trades anymore. Trade companies doing traditional stuff.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: I think that's just going to go...

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: Because it is and it has been for a while. There's not really a market for anyone and that extends to what we talked about earlier, quality control, and economy, and fast production stuff like that. All that instant stuff. Yeah and then people have got different tastes now.

Helena: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Francisca: Yeah.

Kurt: Art movements have moved on since then. No one wants to buy a rococo tea set or something like that. There's not a lot of manor houses with...

Francisca: Yeah.

Kurt: Sixteen servants or whatever. I think a lot of it now is based around... Because there's a lot of soul traders, I wouldn't call them silversmiths, I'd call them artists. I wouldn't call what I do outside of the company blacksmithing I'd just call it... because I'm not a blacksmith, I'm an artist and that's what my work is for that. It's my expression of what I want to do. It sounds a bit silly, but...

Helena: No.

Kurt: Or pretentious or whatever.

Helena: No, it doesn't, because I think we don't specify within that...

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: That area of things and stuff like that. We also do other stuff as well.

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: It's not like when we are drawing and designing work, that's not silversmithing such as it's...

Kurt: It extends to it.

Helena: Yeah, but...

Kurt: Both avenues, but yeah.

Francisca: I guess it's where artists expressing in that medium. In this medium.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Yeah.

I think when it becomes your own designs and stuff like that, you're working in that

independent manner, that's when it's more of an artistic thing rather than trade thing.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Yeah. What was I saying? Yeah. In answer to that earlier about the little mesters, I think that because there's going to be more of a- then there is now. More independent makers and stuff like soul traders, whatever. I think it's going to be, or it should be like that little mester environment, like it was before people decided to assemble companies where you could take your work to someone else, because... And that's going to be such a good... That's going to be so helpful for all those people making and stuff, all those local people, and it's going to build a better community for them. Rather than buying elsewhere.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: It's going to support, all that jazz, support...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Your local business and things like that.

Helena: You're supporting each other.

Kurt: You're supporting each other.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: We're going to help each other out in that and benefit them. If you need to rely on, you can send it to someone for buffing, or hammering, or someone who's going to be specialized in that, or smithing, or whatever.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: Someone who can make a tool, or restore something, or whatever. Yeah. I think that's what people need to do, whether or not... What I'm saying is earlier, I don't know whether that is achievable, because like I said, you can't influence people to do that. It's got to be... They got to see it for themselves take it on their own...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Accord.

I think that is where the way it needs to go, because there's not going to be any trade left. Probably shouldn't say that, but...

Helena: You are seeing it from firsthand.

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: There aren't you?

Kurt: Yeah.

Francisca: I feel like it's something that we don't really like to talk about, because we do see that it's happening.

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: Where...

Francisca: Yeah.

Helena: We don't really want to...

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: Acknowledge it.

Francisca: We don't want to...

Kurt: I meant more in commercial sense, like tea sets...

Francisca: Yeah.

Kurt: And traditional trade.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: I don't think there's going to be much of that. It would be good if it did, but with the way that the world is everything's made out of stainless steel now...

Helena: Yeah.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: And that's fine. Stainless steel's superior. It all... It's more durable and it won't tarnish...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: It's cheap.

Helena: Not as many people are paying for this luxury...

Kurt: Yeah. That's also influenced it. Yeah.

Helena: Yeah, product.

Kurt: The quality standard. Yeah. I think it's going to get to that point and then it should be, you know, that little mesters thing. Then maybe even... Well, I can see that being more for the maker's designs and stuff, you know. As artists they're relying on each other rather than commercialization of products as a whole.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: I think maybe at some point there might be a collaborative of people who then do form companies where they want to specialize in...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: These products. They're joined together to produce their products. It's definitely exciting. Yeah. I'd be excited...

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: To be in that place at that time when we can all count on each other and stuff, you know. The way it is now, it's already a really friendly environment.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kurt: I was saying to someone it's just great for like networking and stuff...

Francisca: Yeah.

Kurt: And just making friends and people that you can count on.

Helena: Yeah. It is slightly still like that, at the moment.

Francisca: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Helena: I'd go to Dave if I want something spun...

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: I know who to go to if I want something buffed,

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: Or I know who to approach if I need a particular help on something. I know there's people I can talk to...

Kurt: Yeah.

Helena: And that is quite friendly.

Francisca: Yeah.

I think when we were talking about this project, I think, the word that stuck out for me was generosity. And that everyone is really generous with their skills and with their knowledge as well.

Kurt: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Francisca: They're generous to... They're happy to spend time showing you how to do stuff.

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Yeah.

Francisca: Spend their time telling you about a certain thing. I think... I don't know. I think in our craft, specifically, you get that a lot. I don't think a lot of other crafts have that.

Kurt: Yeah.

Francisca: Yeah. I think...

Kurt: That's good then. That already says enough for me that there's hope. That it can go a good way,

Helena: Yeah.

Kurt: Because people do take it seriously. They want to... They genuinely want to help.

Francisca: Yeah.

Kurt: That's good. That's what you need.