

Interviewee: Bill Boone (BB)	Interviewer: Margaret Smith (MS)
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INTERVIEWER	Margaret Smith
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SUMMARY	<p>Bill talks to Margaret about his time at ICI. He was an engineer there and involved in a 'squad' of engineers who were vital to mending, improving and updating the equipment. Because the factory ran 24/7, his job and most others relied on shift work. He talks about the production line process at ICI. The peak period he talks about for growth there was early 1960s to late 1980s, but then 'digital came in and that was the beginning of the end.'</p>

Margaret Smith (MS)

Interviewing
Bill Boone (BB)

MS: This is Friday the Fourth of August my name's Margaret Smith I'm a field worker volunteer here in Dumfries and ah'm here to interview Bill Boone who's very kindly agreed to talk to me principally about his work with the ICI factory here in Dumfries so Bill maybe just start off by maybe just sayin' when you were born and where you were born an' a little bit about yer early life.

BB: Ok.

MS: In a brief summary if possible!

BB: Ok, name's Bill Boone ah was born in Glasgow in Nineteen thirty-seven, an' grew up in Glasgow left school like many people and became involved as an apprenticeship, ah served an apprenticeship as an apprentice fitter or engineer as sometimes is the term used and did night school and eventually finished up doing a two year crash BSE course at Strathclyde, ah then joined the ICI on Teesside North Yorkshire which was an enormous factory probably the biggest factory at that time in Europe. I worked in various jobs in ICI on Teesside they had their own power station generatin' their own power an' steam I then was moved to the engineerin' department that is the place where you actually design new factories a lot of things were going on at that time [they cut the] site was expanding at a tremendous rate the site in fact covered an area of two thousand [*clicks fingers*] -

MS: Square, acreag?

BB: Acres! [*Laughs*] Sorry! It was a big area covering two thousand acres at which products came from basically refining of oil right through to the manufactured [downside] plastic and other products. Ah then moved from ICI on the North-East to start a polyester polymer plant in Northern Ireland near Belfast and then ultimately to Dumfries for the starting a polyester plant. From thereon I had a number of jobs mainly to do with the starting up or the design construction and start up of various plants on Dumfries site and also in ICI Australia and in Brazil.

MS: Ok let's think about the one in Dumfries Bill, maybe give us a wee bit more detail of what the kinna set up was in Dumfries?

BB: Ok well at Dumfries the plastics bit of Dumfries works which was essentially became the only bit of ICI in Dumfries started off with developing a process of making polyester film that process was originally taken from another company and was researched by ICI at Welwyn Garden City in their research department and come out with what they thought was a reasonable basis to build a plant [now] originally the polyester plants at Dumfries quite small for example the film

04:30

width was about less than a metre wide ultimately that film became about five metres wide an' the speeds were increased over a period of time so that Dumfries then started to employ more and more people it had a various number of units and became very very profitable and very productive unfortunately the digital computer come along and life changed

dramatically to the extent that very little of the original plant is left and also that there are much fewer people involved in it something like only a fifth or a sixth of the number of people at peak.

MS: At its peak how many people would be employed?

BB: Overall on Dumfries works on the plastics side there were around about fifteen hundred people, in addition to that there were between direct contractors and sub-direct contractors they probably employed about another thousand people.

MS: And what were the various jobs that these fifteen hundred people doing? What was the structure?

BB: Yeah the structure was we had because we were developing a project over a number of years in other words we were trying to improve its efficiency and its output then we had a lot of fairly technical research-type people whose job was to look at improvement and those basically most of them were of graduate level, we also had the actual guys at the coal face if ye like who were we termed operators shift operators and those operated on a twenty-four hour seven days a week basis and where there were supervisors in charge of each of the units in addition to that we had the back-up because we had a lot of machinery to make sure it was kept in good nick and also that it was repaired on the spot as quickly as possible so we had people both on shifts and on days to carry out the engineering work, and again in addition to that we had a fairly big squad of engineers who were involved in the actual physical design of the improvements and in the production of equipment ['cause that's to satisfy] that design. The engineering people, well in terms of ah would say off the top of ma head ah would say we probably had around about a hundred a hundred and fifty graduates we had a number of first line supervisors and then we had the operators or the engineers and in addition to that we had a set of a number of different contractors doing repair upgrading and new extension work.

MS: It just strikes me why did ICI not employ their own contractors to do some of the work?

BB: We did have our own contractors but where you have a situation where you got peaks and troughs it pays to [use] as and when to employ contractors. Otherwise your starting to cope with the max demand all the time and you can't afford to do that!

09:14

MS: Going back you have actually described the structure and you mentioned a number of units what do you mean by units?

BB: Units being a production line which has the bits and pieces to take in the incoming product the chip if you like to winding up and rolling the film which you would then be exporting through a distribution system onto lorries to customers worldwide.

MS: Right so how many units were - if you can -

BB: We had on polyester film Melinex we had I think about five units on Melinex one but these were very these were the initial units and they were very small and very small in terms of output on Melinex two ah think we had three or four units much bigger and then on

Melinex five we had two units again much bigger so they were going up dramatically in terms of quality and output of the product.

MS: And that was over time?

BB: That is over a period of around Nineteen early-sixties until about the late Eighties, thereafter unfortunately the digital, digitals came in and as a result our customers such as Ilford who made photographic material, some Japanese companies who produce video film videos also disappeared so that was the beginning of the end. *[Laughs]*

MS: Tell me a wee bit about where you fitted into this structure Bill because I think you said you were kinna like commissioning engineer.

BB: Yeah, basically when, as we were expanding over the years then there was a need for somebody at Dumfries to be the overall coordinator of especially *[our]* new units or new bits of the factory, somebody who would define and support the needs of Dumfries management in terms of designing the new plant whereby ye had the project or design engineers at Welwyn Garden City again people representing the research people and I was basically representing production at Dumfries so that we could get things which the guys could find ways tae operate efficiently.

MS: It's sounds as if it was quite a challenge then going between management, research and the production and also the customers?

BB: *[Laughs]* Yeah, very interesting job, ah liked the variety of it.

MS: Was there challenges in it?

BB: Oh there were challenges and unfortunately until you start the plant up you don't know if you've made the right decisions! *[Laughs]*

MS: And had you always?

13:33

BB: No!

MS: Do you want to share are you in a position to share any idea of what went wrong, and you had to correct?

BB: Oh there's many things but one of the things which *[ah]* learnt from Australia was that I found that in the UK we tend to want things to be perfect when we start up and that ye can't make mistakes an' it's the wrong thing tae make mistakes but in Australia they had an attitude that if ye never made any mistakes ye didn't take enough risk, that was one o' my and also ah found again in Australia they take techniques they employed in the construction of the plant was very good ah mean ah learnt a lot from the Australians who'd never built that type o' plant before but they had their techniques that they used in both construction and their adaptability to change and accept that change does bring failure at times that this was accepted in Australia much more than the UK.

MS: Interesting, fascinating isn't it? If you have to look back over your time at ICI what's been some o' the highlights?

BB: Can you switch off [ah don't want them to think!]? Highlights? I think the highlights were seeing a group o' people for example when I came to Dumfries there was a group of people [had] to start the polymer plant I being the sort o' senior engineer but there were other engineers there was one from Runcorn in the North West a instrument electrical engineer, there was an engineer from Welwyn Garden City we recruited new people for the polymer plant and at that time there was no resource equivalent to ICI so we had for the engineering we had to recruit motor mechanics and teach them into the ways of working on chemical plants we also had to employ process operators because there were no it was people from who had a bit of intelligence and we trained them into the ways and means of doing things in a process plant so there was a fair element of training involved an' ah think that in a new plant it's like many things ah suppose in life whereby when you have a group of new people together for the first time after a month or two you've started to understand each other much better an' it's [a big] exciting time and you become very much of a strong team without even trying because you know what the objectors are an' everybody's part in, that they play in achieving that objective.

MS: Bill you've given us such an insight into how ICI operated it's been really interesting thank you is there anything you would like to finish on?

BB: No ah think it's quite nice to hear from you Margaret and the other people involved with your project that this is not being lost to the future.

MS: Well thank you on that Bill.

17:51

[Private discussion follows until end of recording at 18:20]