

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard:

Raymond Fenech

Date

10 December 2020

Primary Maker

Raymond Fenech

null

Dimensions

25 minutes 47seconds

null

Extent

1 digital audio recording (WAV)

Object Type

Oral history

null

null

Collection

Malta Dockyard Oral History project

Museum

Malta Maritime Museum

Registration Number

MMM.AV0007

Description

This recorded interview was made as part of the Malta Dockyard Oral History project by the Digitisation Unit, Heritage Malta, under the direction of Joe Meli. Raymond joined the dockyard as an apprentice for three years. He joined as a shipwright and he remembers very well some of the ships having major repairs during that time, as well serious accidents that happened at the dockyard. He left the shipyard in 2003 with an early retirement scheme.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) Joined as an apprentice for three years.

During that time, they learned 9 trades, smith work, sheet metal work, woodwork, pipework, electrical, welding, gas welding, gas cutting, lathe working and bench fitting. This was during a four-week period per trade. After these 9 skills, they were given the opportunity to choose their trade and Raymond chose to become a shipwright and he attended the drawing office, boilershop, the prefabrication shop, etc., where he spent 3 months before being sent with the afloat section. (02:45) After the apprenticeship, he then got his full job. At that time, there was the Vistafjord, a passenger ship, that had extensive refurbishment work, mainly the fabrication of an aluminium structure. Which was quite new for him, but thanks to new machines and equipment they managed to complete the work. He also remembers the Cunard passenger ship which had internal renovations, and a laminate called 'formica' was used. He remembers that when applying the glue, they became dizzy. (04:45) He recalls the opening of No6 Dock, which brought more employment, including working on two major ships, the Lampas and Lepeta. His job consisted of working in the tanks, which were about 10 storeys high. In simple terms, he compares his job to the work known today as a panel beater, but on a much larger scale. They made a template of the steel

plate (pjanca) that had to be changed, forming the template with wooden strips. The template was fixed to the existing plates with 'friecket'. Then they transferred the outline of the new plate on to the wood with a 'boska'. Then they took the template to the plate shop where they cut the new plate to shape. If required the plate was also shaped according to the shape of the ship. (08:30) Shipwright were also involved in joinery work in cabins, water-tight doors, they use to open and close manholes, etc. (09:00) He recalls two main accidents, one in 1989 when one of the dock arms collapsed in No.6 Dock killing four workers, and one in 1995 when the ship exploded, killing 9 colleagues. In 1996 unfortunately, Raymond had retinal detachment and after some time he was able to get back to work and ended up being a storekeeper. (10:15) As a shipwright afloat, he had a lot of tools, some of which were: the steel chisel (skarpel) and the hammer, the steel wedge (kunjard tal hadid), Dot punch (puntelbozz). Also had a 'xamakka' which was a piece of steel plate, with a cut out piece from one of its corners. They also used drills (trapani) up to 2 inches, drilling machines, cross cuts, pull lifts, chain blocks, spanners, pliers, etc. (13:00) Strikes-He remembers some strikes. Once they went out and blocked the road in Marsa, to support other workers, not from the shipyard. (16:45) He remembers how Joe Carbonaro fell while working on a workshop roofing and was saved thanks to the doctor, but unfortunately ended up in a wheelchair. He remembers this as he was his close colleague. He remembers one episode when the wind force caught one of the No.6 dockside cranes which almost fell into the sea. Also remembers when No.7 Dock was constructed, where they constructed the tug boats for the China. He recalls when Gorbachev came to Malta, and it was a very windy and rainy day, which caused a ship to break its moorings (on 9th December) and was about to hit the dock gate (kexxun).