

# Object Summary

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## Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: Joe Pace

### Date

15 June 2021

### Primary Maker

Joe Pace

null

### Dimensions

48 minutes 30 seconds

null

### Extent

1 digital audio recording (WAV)

### Object Type

Oral history

null

null

### Collection

Malta Dockyard Oral History project

### Museum

## Registration Number

MMM.AV0049

## 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. Joe joined the dockyard in 1966 as an Engine fitter. He completed his apprenticeship and was assigned with the fitters' afloat section gaining experience from established fitters on the job. He worked on the assembly in Malta of the power station coming from Palermo and subsequently involved in the dismantling of another power station in the UK. On his return he had the opportunity for a post of a chargeman and moved up to the post of the department manager of the fitters' afloat section. He left the yard in 2010 when the shipyard closed down.

## Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) He was born in Senglea, a British navy city culture. His father was a shipyard worker, and his two brothers were also shipyard workers. From his mother's side, practically all relatives were seamen in the Merchant Navy. This meant a mixed culture of shipyard workers and seamen. His uncles being in the Merchant Navy used to give him mechanical oriented toys such as trains, airplanes, cars, etc. When he was growing up, at the age of 13-14 years, his tendency was to have a career in the Navy. At that time there were opportunities for Naval Artificers apprentices with training in the UK, and he was interested to apply for this, however his parents dissuaded him from taking this career. His remaining options were either to apply for a job with the Government department or alternatively apply to enter with the Drydocks. Education-Apprenticeship process(04:00) To enter the Drydocks, in 1966, there were more than 1000 applications for 100 apprentices. Out of the 100, there were 20 apprentices over the age 18, which were already working in the dockyard. Depending on the order of merit, the first apprentices, had the opportunity to choose the trade. Generally, the first group chose

electrical fitters, and the second group were engine fitters, and then the other trades followed. His choice was to take up the apprenticeship as an engine fitter. (06:15) He describes his five years apprenticeship. With the first year at the training centre going through the main trades of the shipyard. The following years were concentrated on one's trade. He had the opportunity to reduce his apprenticeship from five to four years because he had progressed well in the scholastic part of his apprenticeship. (07:45) He wished to be allocated to the afloat section, that means on board ships. He liked the work at the machine shop, but he thought that work afloat was more interesting and varied. He mentioned that during his apprenticeship, he liked most the training at the drawing office and the planning office. In the planning office his instructor was coincidentally called Joe Pace. Family and Social Life-Friendships between workers(09:30) Once he went on the job, and this is where his experience started. Meeting with people with years of experience on the job. His career progressed as a fitter within a gang of workers (guy) where they were very close together both on the work, as well as in their family lives. Education-Projects(11:30) He was seconded to the Marsa Power station. This was when the machinery for the power station arrived from Palermo. This was used machinery and equipment that was dismantled from Palermo and transported to Malta and had to be refurbished and re-assembled at Marsa. This work gave him a big experience. Steam and steam turbines, and all related equipment. The American engineers were looking for zero tolerance. This gave him experience in various work, etc. Education-Projects(15:15) After the work on the Palermo power station, he also went to the UK to dismantle another power station to be re-assembled at Malta. When he returned to the Dockyard, after working on the power stations, he realised that working methods at the dockyard had progressed, such as hydraulic tools. There was an opportunity for a chargeman at the shipyard. When he started, he found it difficult to integrate. Then a colleague foreman assisted him. From then on, he moved up the grade to foreman and then to department manager of the fitters' afloat section. His character was to change things, he was keeping the good things and improve with the technology available. Family and Social Life-Friendships between workers(20:30) His staff at the department was excellent, and there was reciprocal respect. His method of management was not to impose, but ultimately a decision has to be taken and it was his role to decide. There were sometimes different opinions on these decisions,

however, irrelevant what line of action was taken there was only one target which was that of reaching the completion date of the work ...He improved a lot of communication with his foremen. He used the way of reporting through a computer system. Family and Social Life-Friendships between workers(29:00) He was quite strict on the respect between the different grades. He insisted on the workers under his responsibility, to be respectful to their supervisors, and to follow the protocol on the use of the colour coded overalls and helmets that distinguished the different grades. Experience through the ranks was important as this gives you better knowledge of the factors that affect the conditions of works. Safety-Health and Safety procedures(36:15) He considers safety as a very important subject. During a safety training course by 'Dupont' , he was very impressed by a phrase that the trainer started his lecture with, whereby pointing his finger towards the attendees and told them "... stop killing people ...." .

Family and Social Life-Home life(38:30) He always tried to switch off when he returned home. This was not always easy, especially when my job required responsibility of other people, that vary in age and character My father, who worked also at the shipyard, used to tell me "... Joe, when you have got a man in front of you, never forget that behind him there is a family, make sure you take the best decision ..." (40:30) He also mentioned the decision to give the yard to foreigners. It was a very bad decision for a lot of people.