

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: Joe

Farrugia

Date

15 July 2021

Primary Maker

Joe Farrugia

null

Dimensions

56 minutes 52 seconds

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.AV0061

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 Farrugia started his apprenticeship in 1966, followed by years employed as a pipeworker on various repair jobs and eventually promoted to the rank of charginman. He then moved to the Shiprepair Accounts section at the time of the computerisation of the systems. Joe left the yard in 2009 during the process of closing-down.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) Entering the dockyard-Reasons for joining (00:30) At the time (1966), working in the dockyard was seen as something important, since there were very little job opportunities. In fact, around 1,000 candidates applied for the dockyard, and only around 100 were admitted. (01:34) The first year of apprenticeship, they were trained on all the trades for 4/5 weeks per trade, such as bench fitting, lathe work, pipe work, smiths, woodwork, sheet metalwork and others. They were assessed on each trade by their relative trade instructor. On completion of the first year, the apprentice would choose the trade he wanted to follow. At that time, the most requested trade was that as electrical fitter, of which only a small number was required. He joined the pipe fitters. The trade was good, they had overtime, allowances and important work as the other trades. The examination to enter the dockyard was in parts. The first two parts were meant to assess the technical knowledge of the applicant. Once that applicant passes these technical examinations, they had to do the medical test at the Bighi Hospital. (06:15) They attended school to get the G1 (General Course in Engineering) certificate. It was good for him because his secondary education was more academic than technical. (07:45) He

remembers his instructors during the first year. The bench fitting instructors were Mr. Fsadni, Mr. Gilio; Nardu Farrugia (he was a MUSEUM member) was the Electrical instructor; Lathe work instructors were Mr. Spiteri and Mr. Adami; Smithery instructor was Mr. Joe Grech; Mr Magro was the sheet metal instructor. After the first year they left the training centre and were grouped by their trade under the supervision of a training supervisor. Mr. O' Brien was the senior the training supervisor. Mr. Vince Meli training supervisor of the pipefitter apprentices. In total, they were 10 pipe fitters. (12:00) As apprentices, half of them were sent to the shop and onboard for a few months and then they would change position. Apart from the three days practical training in the dockyard, they attended the technical school for two days on different courses depending on their academic background. (14:00) Out of the 100 apprentices that entered the yard, only 50 of them remained in the dockyard. Out of these 50, only about 10 of them continued working as a tradesman. The others moved on in their career to positions as chargeman or in other departments such as the drawing office, accounting department and other departments within the dockyard.

Safety-Health and Safety procedures (15:30) For the trade test they had to bend/shape pipes in the pipeworkers shop, using the machinery and following a drawing/template. The test included welding and joining pipes with lead. He added how they used to work a lot using lead which was a dangerous material. They also worked on asbestos, which at the time was not considered a hazardous material. Noise pollution was not even considered at that time. Safety was not given much importance in the 60s and early 70s. The personal protection clothing was non-existent at that time. Eventually this improved a lot. There were also a lot of other improvements in the working conditions and practices.

Entering the dockyard-Trades (From approval to the departure of a vessel) (19:30) His job as a pipe worker afloat involved dismantling of pipe sections that needed to be changed or repaired. Before dismantle, the boilermakers removed the pipe brackets (this was a system inherited from the Admiralty work practices). One dismantled, the labourers would then take them to the pipe-shop. At the pipe shop, they fabricate the new pipe, using a gig to reproduce its shape and position on the ship. Generally, the same flanges are used and sometimes the pipe was galvanised at the galvanising shop. Also, as pipe fitters, they carried out specialised work on the radar wave guides. These were rectangular copper pipes (ducts) which conducted radar signal waves. Only a few pipeworkers

could do this work. The ducts were cleaned from the inside using acid. When bending was required, a special procedure was followed. (26:45) Piping systems transport liquids of various kinds. The piping material depending of liquid passing through it. Salt water piping had to be cleaned in acid and then hot dipped galvanised. The ballast piping system were also galvanised).On tankers, the main piping were cargo pipes, which transfer oil cargo from the pumps to the tanks. (28:30) A major work he remembers the two large Shell tankers The Lampas and Lepeta where these vessels had pipes made out from a plastic/PVC material, which was a new experience for the shipyard. Other large projects were the passenger vessels which involved a lot of work and pressure to complete the work in a very short period of time due to the vessels' schedule.He remembers, one of the passenger vessels had a damaged pipe in the generator room leading to the engine room. The renewal of the relatively small pipe section, involved the removal of about 22 other pipes sections that were in the way. (32:15) When there was the requirement big equipment, such as generators, from the engine room or any other main machinery spaces, the procedure was that the shipwrights opened a part of the ship side for access.But before burning of the shipside, there was a lot of work for the pipeworkers in the removal of piping systems in way of the shipside that was to be removed. The pipeworkers also had to remove all the pipes that were connected to the machinery that was going to be replace. This entailed marking of all the parts (pipes and flanges), so that the sequence of removal is registered and eventually followed during the replacement. (35:00) Going back to the Shell tankers repair, new working procedures were used such as burning of tank plates to facilitate the movement of labour and material from one tank to another.As they had to change the pipe bulkhead penetrations in tanks. Due to the height of the tanks, the dockyard had to organise additional lighting such as floodlights next to the scaffolding, plus large amounts of temporary electric lighting.Tank testing was done by the chemist every morning in the tank. Testing was additionally done whenever a pipe is removed, to make sure that the tank is safe for hot work. (41:30) After working as a chargeman of the pipe workers, he moved and joined the shiprepair accounts, where he was assigned with an experienced accountant Anglu Attard. When he joined, the department was starting using a computerised system. Entering the dockyard-Trades (From approval to the departure of a vessel)(41:45) The job of a shiprepair accountant, starts when

the ship arrives in the yard. He had to follow the work being done on the ship, and oversee that the work on the vessel being done is according to the agreed quotation. The differences are registered and used to issue the final invoice that reflects the actual work carried out. When there are changes in the work, they used to consult with the estimators and the relative production department to assess the additional costs, which have to be agreed with the superintendent prior to the commencement of the additional work. He was involved as a shiprepair accountant on the contracts of the Fjord and Fjell. The work on these projects was estimated by the estimating department for the known work. (45:30) Then a new foreign manager was employed with the yard and he revised the estimate to a much lower figure. Farrugia was not sure how this figure was reduced. During the work there was an agreement, that work would continue even if the variation cost is not available. This meant that the ship representatives were not under pressure to agree to the variation cost. The end result was that this resulted in a big issue with the variation costs. Safety-Accidents (51:45) Accident of the dock arms. During that day, they were working overtime on a vessel, alongside the No6 Dock. Basically, the cement on the dock side failed and one of the dock arms collapsed killing four people. After the accident, everybody in the shipyard was sent home. He and his team stayed on their vessel as it was scheduled to leave on that same day, so unfortunately, they were present during the accident. Another accident he remembers was when his colleague was coming out of a tank and accidentally without realising fell into an adjacent tank. He was badly hurt.