

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: John Darmanin

Date

23 September 2021

Primary Maker

John Darmanin

Dimensions

38 minutes 29 seconds

Extent

1 digital audio recording (WAV)

Object Type

Oral history

Collection

Malta Dockyard Oral History project

Museum

Malta Maritime Museum

Registration Number

MMM.AV0076

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. John Darmanin entered the yard with the 1969 apprentice intake in the Painting trade and after his apprenticeship and further education and training was promoted as chargeman on shiprepair and shipbuilding projects concluding his yard life in 2009 during the closing-down process.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) He joined the dockyard in February 1969, as trainee welder/burner. In the same year he re-sat for the apprentices' examination and was successful. He then switched from trainee to apprentice, and started the first year in October, where they were trained in the main trades of the shipyard. During his second year he chose to go as a painter and decorator. He mentions that many of his family members used to work in the Dockyard, including his father, grandfather, uncles, etc. He was trained by an instructor Mario Girxi, who worked at the Manoel Island. At the same time, he studied for the 'City and Guilds'. He mentions that in England, being a painter and a decorator was similar to being a contractor. (04:30) He spent some time with the shipbuilding

section at the No.1 dock. His apprenticeship, was divided, eight months at the dockyard and another four months at the Manoel Island yacht yard, because the work there required high quality paint work. His type of work was always on demand especially for high quality painting of decorated lettering. Workers for this type of work, painted signs of old shops, worked on marble, tiles, etc., in other words, the painting department work was very vast. When he finished his apprenticeship, he was stationed at No.1 Dock with the New Building section. Then he and another group were sent for two months on a course in Yugoslavia, where he increased his experience on paint work and quality control. When they returned, he started working as a chargeman within the Painters' department which covered both shiprepair and shipbuilding. Then, around the 1980s he became a foreman. Entering the dockyard-Trades (From approval to the departure of a vessel)(09:30) His work involved practically all the areas of the ships. Every place and anything that is on a ship, requires painting, which in fact, gave him a wide-range of experience on painting work. External protection, including topsides and underwater of a ship, have to be protected, so they used to wash it with high pressure fresh water. Then they carry out blasting and then coating. He explains that when painting the under-water area, the requirement is for thicker paint coatings. The final coats applied were those with anti-fouling paint. Education-Interesting training and skills (12:45) Working with tanks were a different story, as this depended on the type of liquid they carry. They first do an inspection and then depending on the state of the tank, the ship personnel together with the paint supplier decide what coating system to apply. Generally, the bottom of the tanks required more attention as these are more liable to corrosion, and on occasions certain heavy corrosion pitting were filled with filler. They also blasted and painted fresh water tanks and fuel tanks, which required a different paint system. The paint they used came from the suppliers already coloured and they never mixed the paint at the yard. Education-Interesting training and skills (15:30) They had methods of calculating the paint required. They worked it on volume against area. Once the area is calculated, depending on the thickness of paint required, the volume of paint can be calculated. During winter season, they faced weather problems, because of rain or even humidity level that prevented them from painting. With Humidity of over 75 percent, they would not be permitted to paint. (20:00) When he became a chargeman they had only a few workers who could spray, so painting was applied by roller (romblu). They started to change the system, as new machines for preparation and painting were introduced. They started training the workers on how to use the new equipment. At that time, the decision was to employ 40 trainees to work specifically with paint. Some of whom ended up being among the best workers in that department. (24:00) In the 70s, the coating systems of tanks were very basic. At that time fresh water tanks used to be coated with cement, and this lasted up to the 1990s. The yard also had a machine to spray the cement. When painting ballast tanks, these have to be well ventilated, so they either cut hole in the tank or used extractors and de-humidifiers to keep the tank in an acceptable atmosphere suitable for painting. The protective clothing was very important and also expensive as it changed every time it is used. (30:30) The importance of the paint application was never fully understood by the other trades. They needed the support from the ship managers to plan the paint work, as this was a task that was on the critical path for the completion of the work. By time, anti-fouling paint increased in importance and became a critical job during the repair.