

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: Carmel

Portelli

Date

17 March 2022

Primary Maker

Carmel Portelli

null

Dimensions

21 minutes 35 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.AV0107

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. Carmel entered the yard in 1957 as an electrician apprentice. During the years of his apprenticeship, he had the opportunity to move to the drawing office as a trainee. On completion of his training, he became electrical draughtsman, involved in a lot of civil electrical installations. He retired from the shipyard in 1998.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) He attended the Secondary school at the De La Salle. His father insisted that he moved to the dockyard classes, which he did. He then sat for the dockyard examination and passed successfully achieving 9th place in the order of merit. When he entered the dockyard, he was given a tool box, a file and a block of steel. The apprentices then spent six months learning how to file this steel block. He remembers one of the apprentices was so small that he had to use a wooden box to reach the bench. Eventually they started learning how to do their own tools. (03:45) During the second year of the apprenticeship they spent periods of 4 months each assigned to different electrical sections learning armature winding, motor repairs, etc. The 3rd year they were allocated to a chargeman working onboard ships. The 4th year, he spent it at the electronics shop, something that he did not like, so he asked for a transfer and he was moved to work as a technical clerk assigned to a team of engineers that were responsible to do the transition from the Admiralty to commercial operation of the dockyard. (05:00) During his time as technical clerk, he got to know that there were applications for the post of draughtsmen, so he applied. He was accepted together with another fourteen and he attended a special

course at the Malta Technical college (this college eventually became MCAST) for a six-month course in draughtsmanship, which he passed successfully and was moved to the drawing office, which at that time was attached at the back of the machine shop. So, he basically became a draughtman during his apprenticeship. (06:15) He remembers the Chief draughtsman Mr Adcock, who was very strict. Eventually he was assigned to work on the compilation of technical data for new-buildings. (08:15) He describes in some detail the No 1 dock area, where he spent his apprenticeship. He also recounts when he received the letter that transferred them from the Admiralty to the new company Bailey. (10:15) He remembers that there were strikes, but during his apprenticeship, they were not allowed to take part, so their supervisors did not allow them to stay out of the workshop. By time this changed and he remembers that there were instances that it was compulsory to participate. (11:15) He remembers that at one time, the dockyard used to take contracts for electrical installation work. He particularly remembers doing the final documentation and as-fitted drawing for the electrical installation of the Malta University. (12:45) He describes in some detail the electrical work that was carried out on new-building of ships since 1967 or 1969. (16:45) He said that with time, the work at the electrical section reduced gradually. (21:15) He liked the work in the shipyard and remembers the friendship with his colleagues. However, he considers that politics from all sides damaged this atmosphere, especially when additional workers that were not to standard were being employed.