

# Object Summary

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## Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: Laurie

### Azzopardi

**Date**

25 March 2022

**Primary Maker**

Laurie Azzopardi

null

**Dimensions**

53 minutes, 7 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.AV0108

## **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. Lawrence entered the yard in 1947 as an electrician apprentice. On completion of his apprenticeship, he was sent to England and became special fitter working as a diagnostician. Eventually he moved up the ranks to become Departmental Manager of the Electrical department up to retirement in 1991.

## **Transcript / Summary**

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) He entered the dockyard in 1947 as an electrical fitter apprentice. On completion of his apprenticeship, he was sent to Portsmouth for 3 months where he became a special fitter. He remembers that at that time, the workers used to get an increase in pay every 2 years of 1 shilling per week. This meant that to get an increase of half-a-pound, they had to wait 20 years (Editor's note: maybe he meant 10 years). Since he became a special fitter, he had an increase of half-a-pound at one go. (02:15) After becoming a special fitter, he took the position of diagnostician, where his work involved solving technical electrical problem. He eventually became foreman and the manager of the electrical department. (02:30) He remembers, that the dockyard was basically the only place to work, there were limited alternatives. His father was with the Navy. When he entered the yard, he remembers 2 of the instructors named Degiorgio and Ellul, who instructed them throughout the first. The remaining years they were then assigned to different sections at the No. 1 Dock area. (04:45) The No.1 dock was the submarine repair area. The refit of a submarine generally took months. He recalls a certain Borg Marks, who eventually became his manager, who was very precise in the quality of his work

and used to polish the lead cables in the Radio room. He remembers also his supervisors, Commander Nicholas and his boss Mr Fisher. (06:30) The work on the submarine was difficult, they used to open two hatches, one forward and another at the aft of the submarine, with fans, so as to have adequate ventilation. He distinctly remembers the sound made by the chippers. (07:00) At Portsmouth, the course that he attended was on gunnery. He describes in some details the work that they carried out on the guns/canons when they returned to Malta. There were 2 technicians, himself and Karmenu Falzon. (10:30) As he remembers, the transition from the Admiralty to Bailey was normal. He recalls very little of the transition. He remembers that during the first year of Bailey, they still used to do Naval ships, but after that the work changed to commercial ships. He used to work afloat, he remembers one project that was quite extensive and they work on the electrical requirement. He also worked on most of the passenger ships. (15:00) He remembers that the Cunard ships came after the Falkland wars. The work was very extensive. He also remembers work he did on the ship Uganda. (20:00) He was also involved in the new building work that was carried out in the repair dockyard, but was never involved in work at the Marsa Shipbuilding. (22:45) The electrical work varied depending on the requirements. They used to work on overhaul on the electrical motors depending on their working hours. They also made new wiring installations on ships. (24:00) Before the advent of computers, they used data loggers. At that time there were ships from Israel that transported oranges from Israel to California. In the USA, they were conscious of the possibility of pests coming in their country with the oranges. So, the Israelites discovered that if the oranges were kept under controlled conditions of temperatures and humidity, they would control any pests. So, they invented these data loggers that logged the temperature and humidity that were sent to the receiving port on a daily basis. He was trained by Elliot Brothers who were the manufacturers of the loggers. (32:45) Laurie recalls that during his 5th year of the apprenticeship, he was allocated with an English installation engineer to assist him in the electrical installation of the Bakery ovens. He does not remember the name and the company. This was only one and was new. He does not remember if this worked with diesel or electrical power. (35:45) During his apprenticeship, he remembers some laughable situations, when his instructor used to send him to remove a fuse from the Fire-switch from one of the stores of the victualling yard. When the store-houseman noticed

that they had no lighting in the store, they used to send for them as electricians to check the fault, and once in the store they used to help themselves with some food for their lunch. (41:00) He remembers one Christmas day, when they sent for him as there was a ship outside Malta with a generator fault. He went on board with his colleague Lewis and solved the problem. As electrician, his work was involved in the generator side, so if the diesel engine is working and the generator was not supplying the necessary electricity, then obviously the fault was in the generator itself. His work was to go through various checks by elimination. (48:30) When he was manager, he had about 200 people in his department. The shop consisted of various sections. The afloat section was as separate. The electrical work reduced considerably over time, so the electricians gradually reduced over time.