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Knottingley & Ferrybridge Neighbourhood Network

Ernie Murgatroyd's Story as told to Charlie Wells, March 2014

Charlie: When and where you were born?

Ernie: Divan Street, Knottingley, and they were Bagley's own houses, as they built them for their employees (*laughs*) 1919. My Birthday's the 1st January 1919.

My father worked at Bagley's. He had two brothers that worked at Bagley's. Eventually my father was the Foreman electrician. His brother, Henry, was the Foreman joiner, and the other brother, John Willy, they called him, he worked in the joiners shop. So there were two in the joiners shop and me father in the electrician, and the three brothers.

I'll tell you how Bagley's came to *me.* Or, they didn't come to me, they came to my father. Being an electrician, he was called out all hours of the night, quite a lot of the times, and because he lived in a Bagley's house he was the nearest person, nearest electrician, and if anything went wrong electrically, they wanted an electrician and they couldn't… banging at our door, all hours!

Actually me grandfather worked at Bagley's before me father. He was a glass blower. He blew the glass bottles.

Me father took me round Bagley's when I was a young lad, and I watched them gather the molten glass at the furnace and drop it into a mould, and then some of the men, in those days it was hand-made you know, and they press and blow, that's what they called it.

They had a mould with two handles that one worker opened it, and closed it, made sure it was nice and tight, and then, the gatherer gathered the metal[1], out of the tank furnace, and dropped the metal into the mould. Then, there was another worker, that had a handle, and on the end of the handle was a plunger, and that went into the mould, and it made a shape in the mould. It pressed the metal on both sides, and it was tapered was the plunger, and that started the blowing part of the mould of the making of the bottle.

[1] This was the term used for molten glass.

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After that, someone would pull that cup over with a lead off for compressed air. He used to pull a lever and the compressed air blew out the rest of the metal round the mould and that in the big jar. It was big jars that they made you know (*laughs*). How long was I there, watching. It took about twenty minutes I should say, maybe half an hour. Oh it was fascinating, yeah. Actually, later on when I started working there I made the ring moulds, the neck rings for those jars, and they were opened by hand, you know.

Well I finished school at 1934. I was fourteen, and I didn't get a job straight away. Now then me father was in the electricians, his brothers were in the joiners shop, they wouldn't let me start work under me father, or underneath his brother, so I had to go into the fitting shop. I couldn't see why, you know, what is it, thought I'd be favoured, under me father, and me uncle.

John Willy Hawkins, with my father in the electricians shop. He was an electrician. When they used to be knocking at the door for me father, and he used to say "Go fetch John will you! And he lived just across in Buelah Place, which was just across the field, it was a field in those days, between Gillan Street and Buelah Place.

I was in the fitting shop, the fitting shop for the Monish machines. There was in those days, there was the Monish machines, Owens machines, they was American, and Lynch, and the Lynch machines made jars rather than bottles. They made the jam jars and the pickle jars (*laughs*) them kind of jars, and the bigger-sized jars, bigger capacity.

The Shaping machine, and that, they got the moulds, they made patterns for the moulds, what they wanted you know, the shape of the mould they wanted, the shape of the inside of the mould. The mould, it was in two halves, and on the machine it came together, you know. The machine was made to, go open and close the mould exactly how they should be you know, and the ring moulds that I made, they open the same, open and close on the machine and everything was in two halves. (*laughs*) It was on the shaping machine, that, when the mould came from the foundry, that's put on the vice in the table in front of the shaper. And the shaper was, a what they call it, reciprocating head, and it used to go backwards and forwards. No it's not backwards and forwards, it's forwards, no, it could be, forwards and backwards! It just went forwards and backwards! And the table used to move by about thirty-seconds a time and it took a cut off the face

of the mould and went right across the mould. It had to be really flat and smooth. After the shaper it went to a bench hand, and he had a big faceplate on the bench, with red lead, and I used to cover the plate, the face-plate with a little, very slight layer of red lead. Put the mould on top and rub it, and all the high spots were shown with red lead, it marked the mould face, and then they had to just file a little bit off on all the high spots until they got it nice and smooth all along.

There was the facer, who faced the mould, and then it went on to a lathe, it were turned, the outside was turned first to fit into the machine, and then the inside was turned if it was a round bottle. If it was not a round one, bottle, it went to the Miller machine and the operator there cut the shape, they cut into them, on the Miller machine, and they used to, the table on the Milling machine traversed, you know, so that the tool that was spinning, cut into, cut along, and they were usually the size of the bottle, you know the length of the bottle, and that cut, the cast iron out into the shape they wanted. And then it had to go to the bench hand and he scraped it with a scraper and polished it until it was really smooth and shiny.

And then it went, when it was finished, it went to Monisch machines. The mould was in two halves of course, and it was two halves of the mould, two halves of ring mould and a bottom plate, and they all fitted together, on the machine.

Well the centre lathe, was a bigger lathe, the bed of the lathe could be a couple of yards, three yards long, and the turret lathe was just a smaller lathe and that's what I worked on, for ring moulds, because they were a small mould, and the turret lathes did the big moulds.

There were steam pipes all around, and it was warm, not too warm mind because you had to work. They wouldn't want you too warm, you got tired too easily. The fitting shop I was in, was it two storeys? It had one storey above and the ground level story. Is that two storeys or one? Well, somebody had said to me that, there was a ground floor and a first floor. But let's say second storey, because above us was the slates of the roof, the tapered roof. Slates an uh, as I uh, our jobs as apprentices, ah, my job was once a week, to climb up into the loft, and go along the shaft and oil all the bearings. There was wheels at the intervals on the shaft and bearings, and there were belts coming down, you know

how you see belts in these here woollen mills and that, where they work at looms, it were just the same as that. The shaft, that was to drive all the machines in the machine shop. It was a big dynamo down below on the first floor, a big belt from that dynamo to that shaft, it drove that shaft, and that shaft drove a lot of belts that drove little independent shafts for each machine.

It was safe enough, there were pipes along, to walk on, and you held on to the rafters and beams above. The machines *(were off)*, we did it in the dinner hour, you know.

Canteen, their own fire service. Their own, we'd a power house, and big toilets and things and they had everything you know that you needed.

World War 2

I was reckoned to enter *(the Army)* just as I was finishing my apprenticeship, and I was exempt for the year. I was called up in 1940.

My army life, I was in the desert for three and a half years, 1941 to 1944. I was, with being a worker, I wasn't a combatant, I had a machinery wagon and I repaired, I turned things for the bolts and nuts and couplings and all sorts of things for the transport to keep them going you know and just one or two jobs on the guns, you know. That's where I got me deafness. We didn't have earmuffs or anything in those days, nothing. No protection! I've lost too much hearing you know, nearly 80 percent.

CW: And was it noisy at Bagley's, in the machine shop?

EM: No, not as bad as it was in the army you know. When I first did my training, firing the rifle, rifle practicing. I was down in Woolwich in London in 1940 you know, when the Blitz was on, (*laughs*) and we did us PT in us shorts and shirts *(laughs)* oh dear. But after I'd done me training, six months training, I was posted up to Scotland, Stirling at the fourth side depot in Stirling, and then we were flown out, in a group of us to unload.

I'd never had a girlfriend in Knottingley. I was a shy lad, I was a lonesome lad (*laughs*) oh dear! No I never had girlfriends, I used to go out to the pictures, picture house on me own you know. When the pictures were finished and we came out on the street, and I

walked around Ayre Street alone, no girls. But, I was also, a tee-totaller almost, almost I'd say almost. I've never been in pubs or been in inns or clubs. You see I was alone.

Now then, before we go to that part *(after the War)* my girlfriend, she was in service in Scotland when I was collected for this new unit I was going to. The officers never let me see anybody, they didn't give me any time he just says "get in the car" and that was it, I was off. So I couldn't contact me girlfriend or anything. So I had to send her a letter, and she came straight away. I said I'm just on two weeks leave and then I shall be away, somewhere. You couldn't say anything you know, well I didn't know, they didn't tell me where I was going, and she left her job and came and saw me off at Leeds Station, and I went back up to Scotland didn't I! (*laughs*)

From there, we left on a Liner, Strathayred they called it, the name of the Liner, and because of the submarines in the Channel, we had to go up to the top of Scotland and into the North Sea, Atlantic I think it was, and seven weeks later I was in North Africa in Alexandria, Egypt.

Now me wife, she lost her job didn't she, with coming away to see me off. She went, she had to go into munitions. She got pneumonia, she had to come out of munitions, she nearly died actually, she had to come out of munitions, and she volunteered for the NAFFI, and abroad, and she came to Alexandria in Egypt. So we decided to get married. Me mother died while I was in the desert, she died in 1942. She died while I was in the desert and my girlfriend was in Alexandria, in the N.A.F.F.I canteen, serving all these other chaps that we in the base; and we got married in the Garrison church, and I just had a couple of days married bliss, and then I had to go, they sent for me back to the unit, and I never saw her again until I got home. She was home before me. She was waiting for me at my mother's, at Grand Street. So we carried on, we started, really married life then. We had an enjoyable married life, I had a little car and went touring you know. Lands End to John O' Groats *(laughs)*, all down the west coast.

Yeah, I've had a decent life I can't grumble.

CW: When you came back, did you go back straight to Bagley's?

EM: Yes

CW: And they'd saved your job?

EM: Yeah, well I was a top man, at my job I think. I mean, being a skilled worker, it kept me off the fighting side of the army.

CW: So do you know how Bagley's worked when you weren't there? Who took your place?

EM: Yes, they, women did all the work the men used to do, didn't they? They did the same work yeah.

CW: So what happened to them when you came back?

EM: Well they weren't there when I came back you know. All the soldiers etcetera had come back and they all got their jobs back, so the ladies had to finish.

CW: And what did your wife do, down here?

EM: Eee, she wasn't here long enough to work at all really. She never worked. She worked looking after me (*laughs*)! It must have been really hard work.

I stayed in the fitting shop all me working life, in the same shop, doing the same, making the moulds.

CW: Did you see things change when you were there?

EM: Not a great deal. There wasn't really much to change. The only change was the automatic machines. The machines that we had were what we called, a five-header, that meant there were five moulds on the machine and it went round, and for each mould it more or less stopped them it was, the metal came out of the tank, there was an aperture in the tank, and there was a plunger that pushed the metal through. But so much, there were sheers at the top that cut the metal off, and it dropped down to the mould.

That was molten glass, they called it metal, you know. Molten glass is metal, and what they called it was, the amount of metal was a 'gob' a gob of metal.

Now, the moulds had blanks as well and that was a mould that shaped the metal when it fell into the mould. It was a little bulge at the top for the shoulder of the mould, then a straight bit then another bigger bulge at the bottom like an onion. That was for the base, the bottom, of the bottle as well as the sides. So that was the shape it made, the blank mould. The ring mould was below that, it was upside down, the partisan mould, and that turned over, and the ring held the metal up, and the mould came round the metal, and then it was blown. And it was only like a '*puff!*' and the bottle was made.

Busy all the time. The ring moulds, had all different screw-tops, crown cork tops, the CM, that was a cork mouth, OS, an outside screw. There was RO, rolled on, and an ROPP, Rolled on Pilfer Proof, we just called them ROPP. For all these, I got drawings telling me what size to make it, what thread to put on it, and everything, all the measurements the diameter measurements and everything.

It was quite skilled work (laughs).

The fitting shops I mean ours wasn't the only fitting shop. Our fitting shop was called the Monisch fitting shop, the glass bottle machines were Monisch machines, these are what we call the fiver headers.

There was the Owens fitting shop, they looked after the Owens machines, they made moulds for the Owens machines. The crystal, I have some crystal actually, some of them candle sticks, they made coloured glass, blue and green, amber, and there were dressing table sets, and that's what I have somewhere, crystal.

There was pipe-fitters, black-smith, electricians, joiners; they all had their own shops you know, so it was a big place. It stretched from the Bendles to Wheeland Road, and just behind the police station was one of the boundary lines of Bagley's, and the other was Racca Green.

In summer they drank a lot of beer, one of the lads went out and fetched beer into the

factory you know. Well they worked shift work, six to two, two to ten, then ten back to six. That was three shifts, we never worked the electricians didn't work, you know, the joiners or anybody didn't work shifts. That's why my father, they came knocking on our door at all hours of the morning and night (*laughing*) and he used to shout "go fetch John Willy!" (*laughing*) Oh dear. But he always turned out.

Now then, the batch, that's what they called the mixture for glass, was pushed in bogies on overhead rails to the furnace and the tank where it was on a swivel, the body of the bogey and they tipped it over and tipped the batch mix in, for glass, into the tank, the melting tank.

The furnaces were built by brick layers of fire bricks, and some were really big blocks of brick you know, and that's what held the molten glass.

The furnaces, or shops, glass-making shops with the machines, they were all called shops, number one, number two, number three, number four, and so on. The one nearest the Bendles, the canal there, was where they used to get the sand from the ships, from the barges from the canal. That was lifted from the barges in big sort of cradles, and lifted over the big wall, there was a big wall around Bagley's at the waterside, at the Bendles. They used to get it from the barges in these big cradle things and bring it in over the wall.

Sand, soda, soda was plant ash, and lime, limestone. Most of the stuff was from round here, the lime quarries. And also what they called 'cullet', that was all broken glass, all broken bottles and everything, and that helped the sand and the melting of the metal. It melted easy with cullet, a mixture of cullet in it. That was, mixed in what we call the 'Batch Hole'. You went down a slope into the batch place, and there were workers there mixing all the sand, soda and lime and cullet all together. That went into bogies, and this overhead rail, and there were two men pushed a bogie, to the furnace and then it was tipped over into the tank. It was a little four-wheeled bogie, and not too big. But there was a good load of glass mixture in there.

Some of the workers, the men workers were, we call them 'takers in' 'gatherers' and 'sorters'. The gatherers, this is in the early days you know, the gatherers, they had a pipe, and when they blew these bottles by hand, they had a long pipe, and there was a sort of

a ball of clay on the end, the blowing pipe, and they gathered the metal out of the tank, when it was done by hand. They blew it, and below their feet was a long slab of stone, and they rolled it on the stone, blew it again, they couldn't blow it straight you know, like compressed air. The compressed air was '*boom!*' and that was it, a bottle blown. They had to blow it, roll it, blow it, roll it (*laughing*)! Then they handed it to another man who was sat, and there was a rail, and they rolled it round the rail and formed a neck ring. They had some tong things, and they made the shape of the ring, before moulds, there were no moulds. Then there was the press and blow moulds, that were partly hand and partly machine.

It were press and blow, when I first went to work at Bagley's, I made press and blow ring moulds for the top of the moulds and that was a (*claps his hands together*) two half moulds. A hinge at one end, and two arms to open it, and they open and close that by hand, and the gatherer got the metal on the end of the rod, let it fall into the mould, gathered it, held it over the mould, and then let the metal drop off.

'Takers-In', they were taking the bottles from the machines into the lehr. They had a long rod, with a sort of basket on the end that held three bottles.

The man at the machine, he had tongs, four sets, kind of thing, and he lifted it up by the neck and that the first part that was blown, you know that was cool, and he lifted that and he put it on a face-plate. It had a round, sort of a hill on it where it sat the bottle on it, because there's a round bottom, it's pushed in at the centre and then it sits on the edge of the base, and there was a face-plate with a bump on to keep it pushed in at the middle so it would sit still and straight on the base. If they'd have left it without a face-plate it would have sunk and it could have gone the other way (*laughs*) so it wouldn't have stood at all, on its own. On the face-plate there would be three, prongs on, there would be a plate like that for it to sit on, and they used to stand the bottle on there, and it went and pushed that glass up, kept it pushed up while it cooled, so it didn't sink. If it hadn't have been on the face-plate it would have sunk down, that bit, and it would have been a flat bottom, and it could even have gone that way. So that's why the face-plate goes there.

Then, the taker-in used to come along with this here long pole and a basket sort of thing on, put it over the top of these bottles, three of them, just tip it up, carry the bottle to the lehr, tip it over again and stand all three bottles in a row on the lehr. And of course, the lehr was very slow, it was going all the time, but they were able to fill that lehr with bottles. It was very slow, and it annealed the bottles so that they didn't break that easily. It just softened them a little bit or they'd have been too hard, they'd have broken easily. So it made them just a little bit rubbery (*laughs*) you don't get rubbery bottles do you, but it did anneal them, soften them.

And sorters, they checked, well they used to get two or three bottles in their hands, shuffle them about and look at them, and if they saw a defect they chucked it out. It could have been bubbles in the glass you know, a bubble in the glass. I can't think of anything else that would get them thrown out, unless it sunk a bit you know and something like that.

CW: And then when it went automated, you still had sorters?

EM: We still had sorters, we didn't have taker inners, they *(the bottles)* went on a belt and into the lehr.

Mould maker – ring mould maker, neck ring. That was a little bit of neck, and then the shape of the ring, whatever the shape was. See there was crown corks and they're only a little cap, on top. We used to get Schweppes, used to make them for Schweppes, and they were very particular. Of course the top had to be smooth, you know for a good seal.

Home Life & Leisure

We were all characters I think. There was a field between Gillan Street and Beulah Place, and in Beulah Place, they all worked mostly at the Glass Works. And we used to play in that field at cricket and football. Had the bonfire there (*laughs*). It was like a community field. I believe it belonged to Bagley's and they never bothered they didn't use it you know.

On the field there were little cottages, there were about four in a row, facing the main road. And then there was about another three in sort of a little square, at the end. There was, Edes', they worked at Bagley's. There was Addy's, they were little cottages, Uncle Ernie lived in that one. Topsy Addy, Topsy they called him, lived in that one, and then Elvsie lived in that one, they were a relative of some kind I think. John Willy, that's who me Dad used to say "Go fetch him" when he got fed up of going into work, and there was a lady who lived in there, but I can't remember what they called her. That was in 1935, you know, and they all disappeared when Beulah Court was built. There was Beulah Place, there was a field and then there was Gillan Street. That field was left empty, there was fields down here and that was a railway, and there was the Swimming Quarry.

There was quarries, after you got over the railway. Just at the right, you know the school there, up past there over the railway again, there was, up to that railway, there was quarries, limestone quarries and there was one we called the swimming quarry and they used to swim in that, every summer. I didn't swim in those days, I went ice skating though, and I finished up in hospital. We were jumping over a big barrel, a big oil barrel, going up to it and jumping over it, and I fell, and I got a pain and it was a rupture, sort of thing. Whatever I did, I pulled something and I had to go to hospital, I was only fourteen or fifteen. The quarries used to freeze over every year, and we didn't have double glazing, you know, and there used to be patterns on the window in the winter with the frost. Jack frost, you know, he used to come and put patterns, make patterns on the window.

We played 'Piggy'. You had a stick, you bashed it there, the tapered end. It flew up into the air didn't it, and you'd give it a whack with the stick, and then it went quite a long way you know, if you hit it good and hard. And then you strode, or jumped so many paces, and the one that knocked it the furthest won. You had to run, run, as far as the 'piggy' had gone, and that was your score, 'Piggy'.

There were a lad called George Hall, he worked at Bagley's. He lived in Beulah Place and he was a skater and all sorts, he used to skate on the main road, all up and down the main road, and he was really good! He worked in a pit under the transport you know, and when they did maintenance on the lorries and that, he used to work under there and he had a hand lamp and he had an accident with it. It broke, and it set fire to the oil and stuff

that was in the pit, and he was burnt. He nearly lost his life actually. George Hall, George.

1984 I retired. Nearly fifty years. Forty-nine years I did. I was there a long time you know. I should think I with the one ones that worked there longest.

I was happy there. I was happy. Especially after the army *(laughs)*.

I have a photograph of it actually, if I can remember where it is, of a man that lived at Beal, Tom Hawksworth they called him, and George Benson, his father was in the lobby at the top of the yard. When I first went there, there were horses that pulled the railway wagons across the road, two horses, and actually I had an uncle that used to lead the horses, and one winter, the horse slipped, and it grabbed his hand, and he lost all his fingers on his right hand as he was leading the horse you know. The horse slipped, well I've seen them you know, stagger a bit when pulling the railway wagons.

Opposite Gillan street, where I lived, was what we called the chemical works. And they used to, you know those big long sleepers for the rail track, they used to soak them in creosote and tar and make them rain-proof, waterproof. And we used to walk from Gillan Street down what we call the sleepers to a big field, and it was lovely in this field, it was alongside the railway, and there was a big house on the road, Weeland Road, opposite Racca Green and it was Twaites'. It was like a mansion you know, and round it, it had a big high limestone wall and there's a big mulberry tree. It was very private and round the other side of the mansion house, this field, there was this big wall, limestone wall, and then there's what we would call the sleepers. It was a fence built of these long high railway sleepers and that went for thirty or forty yards down the field. So that's why we called it 'The Sleepers', and Twaites', you couldn't go in there it was very private.

Been over the wall once or twice for mulberries! (*laughs*)

Pickling Tank, that's what they used to call the chemical works at the end of Wolmersley Road. I used to gather cigarette cards and I got a lot of cigarette cards from behind the fence at, you know right at the end of Wolmersley Road corner? They used to wait there for buses, didn't they, for the bus, and they used to be smoking cigarettes and if they had a packet, a new packet, they chucked it away over the fence, (laughs) and I got cigarette

cards out of those packets. They had cricketers and all that, you know, footballers. Then we used to play cigarette cards. Flick them, and if one card fell, almost completely covering another card, you got all the cards that was on the floor.