

**Name:** Fred Ambrosius

**Date of Birth:** 1949

**Place of Birth:** Dublin, Ireland

**Duration:** 00:24:05

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I'm Manfred Ambrosius, or more commonly known as Fred Ambrosius. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2017 and I'm about to be interviewed for a history of Milton Keynes done by the Living Archive's people, which I've had dealings with in the past. Twenty...

*And what's the date and year of your birth?*

Oh, 1949, which makes me a fifties child I suppose. I was born in Ireland, in Dublin, and travelled the world from the age of sixteen till I eventually came to Milton Keynes in 1976; fell in love with the place and I've been here ever since, apart from two years in South Africa away, in the eighties, and another two years in Kent away, in the eighties again. But, Milton Keynes, I have to come back to here. Now...

*Would you like to tell us about when you first arrived in Milton Keynes? What was your first thoughts, on arrival? (Just hold on one second...)*

*[Break in recording]*

...place I saw in Milton Keynes was Bletchley and I wasn't much impressed by it. It gave me that secret sort of air about it. People were treating strangers as if they were German spies. So that was my first impression and I didn't really care much for that. But then, driving – I had a car at the time – through Milton Keynes, where it said 'Milton Keynes North' and then the next thing I would see would be a sign pointing the opposite direction saying 'Milton Keynes South'. Now, where is 'Milton Keynes'? There was no 'Milton Keynes'; there was just a lot of roads telling you to go north, south, east or west but still no Milton Keynes. There was Stony Stratford, there was Wolverton, there was Bradwell Village, and a few other old villages that go back to King Henry VIII's time even, but there was still no Milton Keynes as of yet. But then there was one or two estates that were coming up and I applied for one of them once I got a job. The trick was, when you came to Milton

Keynes was, was just get a job. So I walked all over Milton Keynes, on that really hot '76 summer, until I found a job: any job. I would walk into a place and say, "Can I have a job please?" you know, "Do you have any vacancies?"

One guy says, "Do you know how to use a micrometre?"

And I said, "Yes."

He said, "Well, start Monday at half past eight," – in Kiln Farm, at this plastics place. So then, that weekend, I had to go all over Milton Keynes and try to find out what a micrometre was...*[laughs]*...so I could start in this job on Monday, which was a simple enough thing.

But I stayed a year at that job, which was a plastics in...Making plastic tube and...And got a three-bedroomed house in Stacey Bushes, which was pretty neat. I had a nice girlfriend at the time. And then I got a job in Wolverton Works, which I ended up staying there for ten years, driving an overhead crane in the lifting shop. And that was very, very old-fashioned. Wolverton Works had been established in the early 1800s sometime. The Royal Train is still housed down there now, I think. And there was five thousand men worked there at once upon a time but now only two and a half thousand men worked there, when I worked there, which was still a considerable amount of people. It took all the people of Wolverton in – that was including all the ladies doing all the stitching and sewing for the upholstery on the trains and the curtains. And all the men would either be welders or coachbuilders, painters, you name it. They were building the coaches there that would be the Royal Train's. And that was a good long part of my life in Milton Keynes, in the beginning, and I was pretty much cycling to work every day along with the other thousands.

*[Break in recording]*

...came to Milton Keynes from London, through the dole office, but plenty of work in Milton Keynes and if you get a job you can get a house. So, after walking around Milton Keynes for a couple of days, staying at a friend's house in Greenleys, I finally got a job in Kiln Farm at this plastics place. The guy who interviewed me asked me, did I know what a micrometre was, and I said I did, so he said, "You can start Monday at half past eight." So I had to go around the whole weekend trying to figure out what a micrometre was – which was a measurement for small measurements of plastic tubing. In fact, I bumped into the guy who actually made the dyes in the place, in a pub in Stony Stratford – Fred his name was, as well, which was rather a coincidence – so the game was given away straight away, really, when I joined...when I went to the job. Everyone knew by then that I hadn't got a clue what I was doing but it didn't matter.

Milton Keynes was all full of people who had just come from somewhere else, whether it be London or Uganda – there was a lot of Ugandan Indians here – or Scotland or Wales, or wherever it may be all over the country. So there was quite a mishmash of different people in Milton Keynes which I think makes people get on a lot better with each other. They found that, when I was in the Merchant Navy, that if they had crews of a ship that were all of the same town – say, Dubliners or Belfast or Liverpoolians or something – there would be trouble. But if you mixed all the crews up it seemed like they got on better. Probably they're figuring out each other's accents for a start. But Milton Keynes is almost like that as well: you have Scots and Irish and Londoners and Welsh – who knows; they're all here. Plus you have emigrants as well but they're all quite happy living here too. There is no sort of obvious racism in Milton Keynes that I've ever seen since I've been here. I did live with a girl when I first came here who was half-caste, so I never had any problem there. The next lady I lived with in Milton Keynes, several years after I'd left Milton Keynes to go back to Ireland – in my own hometown. I had to sleep in a tent for seven weeks until I decided, 'This is no good, in my own hometown. I'm going back to Milton Keynes. At least I can get somewhere to live.' So I came back to Milton Keynes and got a flat in the City Centre and I lived there for a couple of years. Now, the City Centre may be a nice place to go shopping but, I can assure you, at night time it's quite dangerous. There are a lot of little undercurrents in the City Centre. If you live there, there are not...very well looked after by the police or the council. It's a bad mark on Milton Keynes, the City Centre itself, after midnight, with drugs and prostitution etc. I shouldn't really be saying that or smearing Milton Keynes' name but it's a fact.

But now I'm only a ten-minute walk away, in a cul-de-sac in a sheltered housing, and you can't hear a thing; it's as quiet as anything here. I couldn't get to sleep the first night because it was so quiet after coming from the City Centre, which is only ten minutes away. And to get to the City Centre, as well, it's a couple of minutes on the bus and, being a pensioner, it doesn't cost me anything on the bus. I used to cycle around Milton Keynes a lot in the early days, so I know all the redways very well. Now I have a mobility scooter and I can use that, which is fantastic. I'm sure they built the redways specifically for mobility scooters, as well as people who cycle and walk. They're fantastic.

So, everything about Milton Keynes is good. I can't hardly think of anything bad apart from that City Centre incident that I mentioned a couple of minutes ago. But my life here has been really good.

*Do you want to tell us about the Wolverton – because that was interesting – the Wolverton Works?*

Well, Wolverton Works, I spent ten years in there. There was two and a half thousand men working there when I was there and I could drive an overhead crane.

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*[Break in interview to discuss technical issues]*

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What year was I starting in Wolverton Works? It would have been 1977, after I'd been a year in the plastics place, and I started in Wolverton, 'cause I'd learned how to drive an overhead crane in Manchester, in the steelworks, so I was pretty qualified to drive the cranes in the lifting shop, which were fifty-ton cranes. They'd lift the trains off their chassis and so on and the wheels around the place; quite heavy lifting stuff.

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But I rather enjoyed it. I was above everybody; I could see what was going on down below me; they were all like little ants running around below me. And it was all a fairly tightly-knit family, it seemed. People that had worked there, their fathers had worked there, their grandfathers had worked there; it was all passed down through the family. And they were locals, Bletchley people and Wolverton people, that had come to Wolverton to work on the railways. So it was quite big and they manufactured trains there – coaches – and the Royal Train, of course, was made there and still maintained there as well. Now, what the...how many men are working there now, or how many women are working there – 'cause men and women, both the husbands and wives, all worked there at one stage – but now, after...when I was there, two and a half thousand, there's probably only about a hundred, if that, left. I'm not even sure how much it is. And now the talk is they're just going to bulldoze the whole lot down. What can you do? There's going to be just a whole bunch of new houses down there or a shopping mall, or something or other. I don't know what'll happen to the historical value of it. Maybe just keep the...one little bit, with photographs perhaps, who knows? But that's Milton Keynes: it'll forever advance.

Even new buildings, like at...in Wolverton itself, the Agora. I remember when they put that up and we all said, "That ugly-looking thing won't last long." And, lo and behold, they're going to take it down now. There's various other buildings throughout Milton Keynes that have been built. The Point, I believe, is going to go. *[Laughs]* But you can expect that in a new city anyway: there will be constant changes until they...will it ever get right? Not quite...not really, not when architects are around looking for awards and there'll always be new buildings going up and new buildings getting torn down for more new buildings to go up... *[Unclear 00:12:26]*. I like it like that, in a sort of a way; Milton Keynes has a constant change. You can get on the bus and travel around on the bus and come across estates that weren't there yesterday. So...or on the pushbike, which I used to cycle around

quite a lot and the redway system is brilliant. The road system, the bus service is brilliant here. If every now and again you miss a bus but...or a bus doesn't turn up, but it isn't that often; they're pretty good here. The train service to Northampton and London is pretty good. So, all in all, you can't really be accused of getting bored in Milton Keynes. You can get to the theatre; you can get to the cinema; you can get to any football game, if you like that. We have our own football team here in Milton Keynes now, which I worked for briefly for a little while, them MK Dons. So yeah, what more can I say?

*I heard that you were a lead singer in a rock and roll band. Was that in Milton Keynes?*

Yeah, yeah, we were pretty dreadful but, you know.

*Did you want to start that off with saying, "I was in a rock and roll band...?"*

Yeah, I was a lead singer in a rock and roll band briefly. Four of us got together and just banged out Rolling Stones and Beatles kind of stuff. We got gigs in The Craufurd Arms; we got kicked out of the Netherfield...

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*[Break in interview to discuss technical issues.]*

00:14:16

I was in a rock and roll band briefly, four of us, called 'Nasty Habit'. We done several gigs around the city, in the Netherfield pub, The Craufurd Arms, the rugby club and Wolverton and various other places. In fact, in Netherfield, we got kicked out by the governor because I started to insult the police, little knowing that he was an ex-policeman, but that's part of the act I suppose, in a way, and I've been a rock and roller and most of us were pretty drunk at the time anyway – we didn't have the courage to perform unless we had a few beers in us. But it was good fun; we didn't get paid that much. We went on...CRMK radio interviewed us – which was ran out of Milton Keynes – and Channel 40, which was out of a caravan on Peartree Bridge – Interaction – so we got televised in there, live, playing in the band, which must be somewhere in the archives, I would imagine, if they still have stuff from Channel 40. Yeah, that was quite good fun.

00:15:36

*[Break in recording]*

...Pilgrims' Tales, it was called. There was a pub called the Pilgrim's Bottle, which is now closed down, which was one of my favourite pubs in Neath Hill, or Stantonbury – Stantonbury? – Linford, Great Linford, I beg your pardon. And I got a hold of a whole bunch of guys in the pub. They were all telling stories around the table over a few beers. I said, "What we ought to do

is, I'll write them down and we'll publish it." So that's what I did. People would tell me the story; I would memorise it and type it out and hand it back to them and say, "What do you think?" Or, we'd just sit around a table and make up stories and I would memorise them and write them down. So I published a book called 'Pilgrims' Tales', which is just a collection of stories from other characters in the pub. So, it wasn't a bestseller or anything like that... *[Laughs]*...but it did get a...it did sell about three hundred copies I think, so I was quite happy with that. It was quite hard work; it's not easy writing anything like that 'cause you have to be careful who you're not going to upset or who you might upset, especially if it's local: people don't really like to see their names in print if it's...but I got a few compliments for it so...that's another good thing about Milton Keynes, that is...we went through the [Green's? 00:17:21] Printing in Stantonbury and they were very, very cheap and they were a little, tiny little, one-room printing works that they have there. I think he was a vicar or something, at one stage. But anyway, in Milton Keynes, again, if you want something done, if you want a recording done, whether it be music or whether it be recitation, poetry or whatever, you can find somewhere in Milton Keynes that you can get it done. And there are poetry readings and little jam sessions and...In the villages and in Newport Pagnell there's jam sessions every week. So there's something going on all the time.

*If you were in charge of Milton Keynes, what would you like to do to make it better? What, in your opinion, would improve the place now, for the future?*

Well, I know that they look pretty much after the aged in Milton Keynes, being one myself now, you know, an OAP – not a DOA, an OAP – but there are a few things that could help in there, for the aged. Young people: maybe a little bit more for keeping them off the streets, so to speak, but there seems to be quite a lot to...I can't really think of anything. It seems to be working all right, the way it's going now. The young people that were here, born here or came here when they were children, now are all adults and they're running the show just like their parents did and they're doing a pretty good job I think, you know. It's wonderful to go and see at some events I go to and, the guy who organised it in the first place, it's his son that's running it and training his grandson, or his son, you know, so it's pretty much a family-orientated in Milton Keynes, so I find it difficult to say to any improvements, I really do. *[Laughs]*

*Is there anything else that you ladies would like to ask?*

*No, I think that's...*

*We've got some good stuff there.*

*Yeah, no, that is good.*

*Is there anything that you'd like to add into the mix?*

00:20:00

I suppose...one thing that I was trying to do here was get a communal computer in to teach elderly people how to use computers and then they could also have a video link-up so they could talk to their grandchildren in Australia or whatever it may be. But that kind of fell short because...

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*[Break in interview to discuss technical issues.]*

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*You just said, yeah, that you tried to get a computer here to help the old people.*

Yeah, but it went flat, not because of the people, the residents – because it's a big mystery to them, you know, they're not confident about trying to learn new things when they're in their seventies and eighties – but, if it was available here, they would use it when somebody would show...their grandchildren would show them how to use it if they came to visit. But the council seem to...don't want to let it happen, for some peculiar reason or another; I don't know why. They say it costs too much money or...and that, to me, is nonsense. To have computers in all of the sheltered housing schemes I think is possible because I looked into it and there are companies, not only are they willing to donate the computers, but they'll also give people here to show them there: to come down, install it for you and show you how to use it and then come down later on and see how you're getting on. That's available through not only one company but several companies but the council won't listen to me; they just...  
*[Laughs]*...so that's a fault, the council can be at fault in Milton Keynes. There we are; I found one: the council has got to be improved. The people that work there, I'm afraid, sometimes can be a little bit negative, you know, and that's on the ground level of things. Like, they didn't do much about when I was in the City Centre, living there, and I complained about all the trouble that was going on and they didn't do an awful lot about it until there was a stabbing, then they had to do something about it, involve the police; but it took that. So the council are a bit slow in Milton Keynes, yes, and they always have been, in fact.

When I first came here the MKDC ran the show. There was only about seven or eight or nine of them altogether, really sharp guys, you know, Fred Roche being one of them and a few of the others, which I actually met personally. But, when they handed it over to the council, the council, somehow or the other, seemed to bugar it up. So the MKDC had to sack the council, retrain them all again and rehire them again, and that was right back in the seventies,

in the early seventies – or the late seventies, I should say. So now the council are back again and the MKDC have dispersed into...they were the New Towns Commission one time and then they were...Park Rangers Trust, I think now, is part of the same people and the people now who seem to be in more power than the council *is* the park rangers. So that's a peculiar bit of politics that's going on. But it doesn't really affect most people that work and live here. It's just little funny things that will affect individuals, you know, as such.

*Thank you for that.*

*That's great.*

*Some interesting bits there...*

00:24:05

END OF INTERVIEW