

Name: Paul Kennedy
Address: Potterspurpy
Date of Birth: 1947
Duration: 00:24:32

Time. Is that ok?

You have to look at me, sorry.

No, she's not bad looking.

If I could ask you first your name and the year that you were born.

Paul Kennedy and I was born in 1947.

And so... let's go right back. When did you first come to Milton Keynes?

We arrived here in the November 1968.

So whereabouts in Milton Keynes?

Well, here, I mean Potterspurpy.

Ah, Potterspurpy. OK. So OK, Potterspurpy. So 1968? So what was it like then?

It was still very rural, very rural. Behind the times, I suppose. But then, we come from Wembley. So Wembley was you know a really busy town and everything, and we really moved up because we just... well we got married in the October and we were looking for somewhere to buy. With a deposit obviously. But we did not have... neither of our parents had their own house, so we didn't have a clue. So we were really, really, had we known, we might not have come, we might not have done it. But the guy who lived on the corner here, he was an electrician and he was travelling from Potterspurpy to Wembley every day to work at [unclear] and my dad was a maintenance guy there. So they were talking one day, and he said: "Well you know, the houses where I live in Northamptonshire are cheap, or cheaper." So I had a little bubble car at the time. So we come, it took us about three hours to get up here to have a look at them. So, you know, we didn't have a clue that was the thing. They wanted 50 quid deposit which we didn't have, so we borrowed the 50 quid off our parents and put a deposit on [ringtone interruption - operator says I'm back for recording]

So you went up here in 68... yep... and were you aware then that the area was designated? For Milton Keynes?

Well the funny thing was, we went ahead to, you know, put a deposit on the house, and get a mortgage. That took quite a long time before we got married. And it was not until the day we was actually signing the deeds that the solicitor down in Emberton said to me: "Do you realise they're building a new city near you?" I said: "No." and he said: "Well don't worry about it he said, because it won't affect you. You'll be living in Northamptonshire, so it won't affect you in any way." So that was the first I heard of Milton Keynes. But then, I worked at Bletchley. I was a foundry inspector, at the time. So it sounds posh, but all I was doing was making sure that what they were doing was done correctly, you know. So I got a job at Dysons Die castings then. But I won't tell you what a dump it was at the time. It really was. I didn't last there long, couple of weeks, that's all. But the beauty was, I had a day off before that and came up here, and I must have had ten interviews. You know, you could walk into places then, and say: "Well I'm looking for some work." They'd say: "Well, what can you do?" You'd tell 'em, ask 'em what the wages were like. I went to Wolverton police station and the guy there, behind the desk, I said: "I'm interested in joining the police." He said: "Oh yeah, you'd be a good, you

know, big tall, big bloke and everything.” So he said: “Yeah, I’ll take all your details.” He said: “Where’re you living. I said “Well, I’m living in Wembley now, but we’re moving up at Pottersbury. We’re buying a house.” He said: “You can’t live in your own house if you are in the police.” At that time, you had to live in police accommodation. So I said: “No, forget it.” I regret that really, cos at that time, back in the sixties, being a copper round here would have been a nice job. I’d have retired when I was fifty, and if these knees had given me the trouble then, it would have been a different story, you know.

Oh well hindsight, hey!

Yeah, that’s right, hindsight is a good thing, in’t it.

So tell me about your work in the city, your involvement in the city.

Well most of that was with the builder’s merchant.

Most of your involvement?

Yeah.

If you could say that.

Most of the involvement with the building in the city was with a brand new builders merchant open in Old Stratford. And there was only two of us. [00:05:00] there was a yardman and myself as a driver. And it started really small and then it got bigger and bigger and bigger, because of the amount of building there was in Milton Keynes. So, yeah, that was really where I saw most of it, because every day, we were going to different building sites, delivering. It was mostly heavy stuff, what they call heavy side builders merchants, which is pipes, and fittings and lots of underground stuff, so big heavy stuff mostly.

That was in the really early days that they were doing all the underground stuff.

Oh yes, that was in the very, very beginning. Yeah, I mean there weren’t many buildings as such then. I mean, the Centre MK was a great massive building site, just one great big muddy field. And they were digging, putting in all the drainage, the underpasses, and that sort of thing, yeah.

Tell me about when you went, and you went and you were surprised by the names?

Oh yeah, well, where the Xscape building is now, there used to be just one entrance, to this massive building site, which, in the end, was Central MK. So you had to go up this big old slope, and there’d be a security guard there, and the security guard would ask you what you got, and you’d show some documentation, and he’d tell you where – I think he must have been on some sort of intercom – and he’d tell you where you had to go... and he’d say: “You got to go to site number 26 or whatever.” And of course the very first time I went there, I said to him: “Well, where is it?” He said: “Well you see that sort of track down there - he said - go straight down Midsummer Boulevard.” And I said: “What?” He said: “Midsummer Boulevard.” I said: “Are you having me on?” “No, he said, seriously, that’s what they’re calling it.” It was just nothing, it was just a filthy muddy track down there. But of course, over the years, they made a really good job of it, didn’t they.

What was it like, being part of that? It must have been so busy.

Oh, it was busy. We always, all of us, as the builders merchant grew bigger, we always worked five and a half days a week, and even then, that was, you know, sometimes you didn’t finish until seven or eight o’clock at night, you know. But that builders merchant, because he was a brand new guy, we had a lot of trouble with all the other builders merchants. They really didn’t want the competition. So quite often, you’d go to a place and they’d be very, very difficult if you went to pick stuff up. I remember the very first time I went to one of the other builders’ merchants to buy some stuff that we didn’t have, and the company gave me cheque, and the guy said: “Two hundred pounds” or something. And I gave him this cheque, and he said: “What’s this?” and I said: “It’s a cheque, the gov’ gave me.” And it said Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Company. Well, we all know that now as HSBC, but at that time, this guy said: “No, I can’t accept that.” So I had to take the blooming cheque back to the governor. But it was genuine. But they did make things awkward for us. It took a long, long time to get established.

It's hard to imagine. It's hard for us to imagine now, just what it must have been like, cos that city centre and all the other building that was going on, it just must have been so hectic and the roads must have been so muddy, and...

They were... yes the roads were really muddy and a lot of places, the city was telling the builders a certain name, but when they ordered stuff, they didn't know that name, so as a driver, it was really difficult quite often to find exactly where they were. You know, they might say so and so site on Woughton on the Green. Obviously you could find Woughton on the Green easy enough, but try and find where the site was. Because a lot of it was set in the infrastructure, you know, the pipework and all the heavy sort of stuff, sewerage, and that sort of thing, you know. I must say that was the best thing that ever happened to us, personally, because there was all that work then, [00:10:00] and I mean, up until I had to finish work, Milton Keynes, I don't think I ever, well no I tell a lie, maybe half a dozen times done a job in Northamptonshire, but in Milton Keynes, yeah, most of the work come from Milton Keynes.

So did you do that the rest of your career, really?

I did, no I didn't really. They made me redundant after about eight or nine years. So then, I had a series of jobs after then, because it always seemed to be when you were made redundant, Aston Martin made their guys redundant at the same time. So everybody was looking for work, and if you were like me, I had you know an HGV licence, even then that was quite difficult to get a job doing. So I went for forklift driver, I went as a bin lorry driver again. And in the end I started on my own, just doing anything I could. I'd always, I was a plumber when I first started work, so I could always do carpentry and things like that. So I started on my own,

Tell me about the other story about arriving at the studios.

Yeah, we had an order for I can't remember how much cement it was, now. I can't remember if it was half a tonne, which was ten bags then. But anyway, I had this order to go to Stacy Hill Farm, it was then. So obviously, I knew where that was, so I went up to this and found this place, and this lady came out. I said I've got this delivery for you. But where are the builds. She said there are no builders. It's for me. Can you bring it in? So I carried these ten bags in, put them down. But when I was in there it was like... well they call it a studio now, but it didn't look too much like a studio then. And there was these weird chicken wire shapes on the floor. And I said to her you know: "I'm not being nosy, but what the hell are these?" So she said: "Well, I'm building a herd of concrete cows. I said you must be joking. She said: "No, no, seriously." Now, I never really thought any more about it. It was not until, well, ye... well I suppose whenever they were finished, I can't remember when, I suppose it was 78 they were finished that I realised that's what she'd been doing, making the concrete cows. And really, that did... it kicked Milton Keynes off, throughout the country. First of all because they were taking a rise out of Milton Keynes, but then, slowly, that went round. So then everybody, not everybody but lots of people pooh-pooed Milton Keynes, but in fact, the concrete cows did it a lot of good. They say that people used to get on that side of the train as they were going down to London to see the herd of concrete cows.

Did you ever go and see them?

Well I did, a few times, cos when my children were small, we'd go there, because they were at Stacy Bushes. And then didn't she, she made another set, and the original set is Museum, now aren't they, yeah. And there were some other concrete things; I don't think she made them. There was a big dinosaur, over at the Lakes Estate.

That was Bill Billings.

Oh that's right, yeah. There was another one too, at... where the Marina is.

In Peartree Bridge.

In Peartree Bridge, that's right, yeah.

At Interaction. There was a dinosaur. So what did you think, when you saw the concrete cows. Did you think: "Blimey, some of that's down to me!" or still "What a mad idea!" or...

I was quite proud, to be honest, to think that, you know, I'd delivered the stuff for that. So, it's funny, because a lot of the estates that were being built at the time, like that great big estate that was being built at Newport

Pagnell, certain... I mean the day my youngest daughter was born, I remember exactly what I was doing cos we were delivering stuff to that estate, you know, so. Lots of it, I was quite proud to be honest, to be, you know, to be part of it, and to watch it grow up, you know. And like I say, at the time, we were all working, though I did have about six weeks out of work [00:15:00] before I started with the builders' merchant. I was working on a farm then, for six weeks, cos I'd been made redundant from another firm. So, yeah, Milton Keynes has done me really proud as far as I am concerned. Although I don't live in Milton Keynes. But, yeah...

When you say you've seen it grow up, what have you seen?

Well, obviously seen the buildings go up, different buildings be built, lots of different companies come to Milton Keynes, obviously more and more people. There is quite a diversity of people, they've come for lots of different reasons. I mean I really only came to Potterspurty cos the houses at the time were cheap. But had I known that Milton Keynes was going to be like that, we would have moved up anyway. But certainly in Wembley at the time, people weren't talking about Milton Keynes.

You see, it was only designated in 67.

Well, there you are... Yeah, yeah

We ask people this, but I don't know... What would you hope to see happening in the next 50 years in Milton Keynes?

Well I think it will become an official city in the end. The only thing is, I can understand people's worries when I saw some of the plans the other day. Between the back of Linford, all the way to Hanslope was gonna be designated as a new, well, almost a town. And it does spoil the countryside, cos one thing with Milton Keynes where they really did think about it, and I think they got it right was for every house they put up, they seemed to plant a tree, and for every estate they put up, they built an open space or they built a lake or something like that, so they didn't just urbanize it. And I mean, it was plonked in the middle of greenbelt land, wasn't it. But, personally, I think they did a brilliant job, and I think that, well and I'm surprised that other places haven't taken that concept, cos they all laugh about the grid-roads don't they, but the grid-roads work, don't they. I mean we all moan if we are five minutes in a traffic jam, but if you went to Northampton, you'd be twenty minutes in a traffic jam. Oxford, you'd be half an hour. So, no, I think Milton Keynes has got it right in that respect.

Can you think of anything? There's some lovely answer Descriptions.

I have got something else I could tell you, but I am not sure whether you'd use it on there.

Well you can tell us and then, well... Cos we'll keep the full video, the full transcript. It'll be transcribed and typed up, for the archive copy, so it will be kept.

Well, all it was, was that Central MK building site, one of the other drivers - there was only two of us at the time at the builders' merchant in the early stages. We had a brand new 35 CWT pickup come from Kelly and Wilsons who were the Vauxhall dealers, brand new, bright orange, logoed, with HGB?? Builders' Merchant, Stony Stratford, but spelt wrongly, with an e instead of the y sort of thing. Anyway, so this guy, I won't say his name in case he gets embarrassed about it, but he had to take this pipework up to the city centre, Central ME, to that same building site. So he arrived, he saw the security guard. The security guard told him where he had to go, Silbury or Midsummer, whatever it was, and he made his way down to where he thought he was supposed to be. And there was no one there. So he hung around for a few minutes and he did not know what to do, but he was dying for a pee. So... no one was around cos it was a massive great big place, so he peed up against the front of the van, pickup. Never thought no more of it, beeped [unclear] a few times, and out of nowhere come this gang who were probably digging one of the underpasses or something. Anyway they come up [unclear]. He said: "I've got all these pipes for you." They said: "Oh yeah, OK." One of the guys said: "That's a nice motor." So the guy said: "Yeah brand new, we only got it an hour ago." [00:20:00] He said: "Yeah smashing. I tell you what though mate, looks like you got a leak down there." He said: "No, no, no, no, I haven't got a leak." The bloke put his hand down and smelt it and he said: "Yeah you have, and its brake fluid." The driver said: "I didn't have heart to tell him." So I do remember that happening at that particular place.

Those people that did the digging and stuff, were they quite hard? I mean...

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah they were, I mean you know they weren't digging like the navvies dug the canal, but they were tough old blokes, because I mean they were working in absolutely filthy conditions, you know. Not all of it obviously, cos a lot of it would be done, you know, with diggers and things like that. But yeah, they were a pretty rough old crowd and I suppose they were the same guys that helped to build the M1. You know, they just moved up each time. I should think a lot of them stayed in Milton Keynes, cos as I said, there was plenty of work there, you know. That work was going on. Then once some of the factories and the places were built, then other people were moving up to fill them places.

I can remember there being huge like caravan sites where all the workers stayed.

Yeah, yeah, well they would, yeah.

In Groveway and places like that, massive...

Yeah, that's right. Yeah, Groveway, I forgot about Groveway. That was the old Dog Stadium, weren't it.

Yeah.

One thing I was gonna ask about, but make sure you look back...

Yeah, yeah...

My question was: "Did you have anything to do with Rocla Pipes? That was towards Linford.

Well a friend of mine, who lived just up the street here, he worked for Rocla Pipes for quite a few years. Cos that was a strange place really, because it was right on the edge of Newport Pagnell. And it was more or less... there was nothing else around there. Just this great big place, making these great big pipes. Bu no, I think that was a good firm to work for actually. My mate worked for them for quite a few years. But of course, once the city got over that stage of sewerage and all the water courses and everything, and moved to the footings stage, Rocla Pipes was not really needed, you know. I mean we were bringing stuff from, you know, I can't think.... Tamworth Way in the beginning on a Saturday morning. I used to go up to Tamworth, load up with these concrete lintels and come back, because there wasn't a place near, well there wasn't a place near that could make these concrete lintels.

Yeah, cos Rocla Pipes was then left desolate, but is now houses and has moved on again [unclear] all these new houses.

Well it always amazed me because, some time ago, we took a short cut, cos it was busy coming back from the hospital, and we, my wife was driving and we came to the, what is the Old Wolverton Road, and she said: "Where are we?" and you know, for a minute, I didn't know where we were. Because, they'd built all these houses there. But there again, although they built them houses, and the Linford Lakes, I mean we were pulling all the... we were taking all the sand and gravel out, that, that was actually a gravel pit at the time. That was where all the animosity between the builders' merchants were, well one particular company in Stony and us, because we were going down the... they had the... they'd never had any competition cos they had all the tippers and everything. But of course we came along and then it was competition. They didn't like it. So there was a lot of animosity there.

[Wars? Unclear].

Yeah, it was really.

I don't think... I haven't got anything further to ask.

No.

And it was all fine and clean, the sound and everything.

There was one little noise.

Yeah, I don't think it was when you were saying something. We could edit that out, sort out the problem. That was between breaths, I think. So that won't be a problem.

Excellent!